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inside » 02/22–02/28 » 2013

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Gunning for Justice

The nightmarish saga of whistleblowing doc Michael Fitzgibbons and his former employer appears to be over

BY NICK SCHOU

FITZGIBBONS: "THESE BASTARDS WERE PLOTTING MY PROFESSIONAL MURDER"

AMY TIELLS

On June 28, 2006, Santa Ana police arrested Dr. Michael Fitzgibbons, an infectious-diseases specialist at Western Medical Center in Santa Ana, for allegedly waving a gun in traffic after they found a pistol and a pair of black gloves in his car. There are still many questions surrounding the incident: Who were the mystery callers who dialed 911, reporting the suspect was a man in a white medical coat driving a brown Toyota Camry? How were police able to find the vehicle so quickly in the hospital's parking lot several blocks away? Why would a soft-spoken doctor who'd just won a whistleblowing lawsuit celebrate by pointing a gun at strangers in traffic?

These questions may never be answered. But according to a jury trial that just ended at the Orange County Superior Courthouse in Santa Ana, there's one fact upon which everyone agrees: The alleged road-rage incident in question never happened. Instead, somebody planted the gun and gloves in Fitzgibbons' car. On Feb. 13, a jury went a step further, agreeing with Fitzgibbons' claim that he'd been framed by his employer in retaliation for an email he sent to colleagues questioning the company's financial outlook. The jury awarded him a whopping $5.7 million in damages.

In his successful lawsuit against the company, Integrated HealthCare Holdings Inc. (IHHI), Fitzgibbons had sought more than $46.8 million, arguing that his arrest at the hospital—and a series of subsequent strange events that nearly killed a family member—nearly destroyed his medical practice and left him permanently scarred with post-traumatic stress disorder. Lawyers for IHHI tried to convince jurors that Fitzgibbons had somehow set himself up in a bizarre ploy to appear as an unstable martyr, a strategy the jury took less than a day to reject.

> Lawyers for IHHI tried to convince jurors that Fitzgibbons had somehow set himself up in a bizarre ploy to appear as an unstable martyr, a strategy the jury took less than a day to reject.

This surreal saga began in 2008, a year after IHHI took over the cash-strapped Western Med and three other Orange County hospitals from the scandal-plagued Tenet Corp. As chief of the hospital's medical staff, Fitzgibbons was concerned that patient care might suffer under IHHI because the company just defaulted on a $50 million loan; in May of that year, he sent a pointed email to colleagues raising that concern. When IHHI officials got wind of this, they promptly sued him for slander and interfering with business practices. Fitzgibbons countersued, arguing that IHHI's lawsuit violated his free speech; a judge agreed with the doctor and tossed out the company's suit in June 2006.

Two weeks after the decision, Santa Ana police arrested Fitzgibbons for the alleged gun-waving, but he was released after the department impounded his car and fingerprinted and strip-searched him at the police station. Because prosecutors had no eyewitnesses, his fingerprints weren't on the gun and DNA taken from the gloves failed to show a match, the doctor was never charged with a crime. But when he went to pick up his car at the impound lot on July 5, he quickly saw something that hadn't been in the vehicle when the police had found the gun—a plastic sack full of pills, each one stamped with the Playboy-bunny logo. Figuring someone was hoping to frame him yet again, Fitzgibbons immediately handed the bag over to his attorney, who flushed the pills down the toilet.

His troubles weren't over yet. On July 16, his daughter's car flipped on the 22 freeway. Miraculously, neither she nor her two passengers was injured, but as Fitzgibbons pulled out of his driveway, he realized one of his tires was flat. Although authorities ruled the crash an accident, Fitzgibbons was suspicious enough to hire a private crash investigator, who found a two-inch slash in one of the tires (see "Car Trouble," Aug. 4, 2006). Irvine police refused to investigate his claims, however, and Fitzgibbons tried to move on with his life.

Yet controversy and lawsuits continued to circulate around IHHI. The company's main lender, Medical Capital Holdings, turned out to be a Ponzi scheme whose investors lost hundreds of millions of dollars, while the lender's executives used the cash to finance lavish parties and even purchase a multimillion-dollar private yacht. In yet another bizarre twist, IHHI chief executive officer Bruce Mogel personally pressured the lender to obtain a $5 million loan for an Internet-porn advertising firm, E-Mark, that appeared to be a phony company (see "New Complications In the IHHI Saga," July 30, 2009).

One of the lawsuits swirling around IHHI led to an under-oath deposition of Larry B. Anderson, IHHI's vice president, which provided the first clue about the mysterious road-rage incident involving Fitzgibbons. According to Anderson, shortly after Fitzgibbons won his lawsuit against IHHI, Mogel told him that the doctor needed to be "humbled." Mogel, Anderson added, then proceeded to brag that he had a friend named Mikey Delgado, a weight-lifting thug who had Santa Ana cops on his payroll and could cause trouble for Fitzgibbons or any other doctor who interfered with the company.

Mogel instructed Anderson to issue a $10,000 check to Delgado's webpage-design company, Form Labs, which never did any work for IHHI, whose own investigators later determined it to be a front company with nothing to show for itself but a post-office-box address in Scottsdale, Arizona, where Mogel lives. After he cut the check and Fitzgibbons was arrested, Anderson suspected the mysterious Delgado had planted the gun in the doctor's car. Those suspicions were confirmed, he adds, when Mogel appeared to relish in Fitzgibbons' plight, even remarking, "People don't know how powerful I am."

Delgado's identity has never been confirmed, although testimony at Fitzgibbons' trial this month revealed that investigators found a photo of him on Mogel's computer after the latter left the company in 2008. Through the public-relations firm he hired at the time, Mogel released a brief statement to the *Weekly* denying any wrongdoing. "I want everyone to know the allegations in this lawsuit are outrageous and untrue," he said. "However, legal prudence dictates that I not discuss the case in the press because of the litigation. The truth will come out."

Mogel didn't testify during Fitzgibbons' recent trial, but Anderson did, repeating his claim that Mogel had set up Fitzgibbons. IHHI attorney David Robinson tried to poke holes in Anderson's story by pointing out that when Anderson gave his first deposition about Mogel's remarks about how powerful he was, he claimed Mogel had uttered them the day he was arrested, when in fact, Mogel was in Florida that day. But Anderson stuck to his tale, insisting that while he'd confused the dates in his mind, the conversation did happen. Clearly, the jury agreed.

Although grateful the case is finally over, Fitzgibbons says he hopes its not too late to rebuild his career. "This destroyed my hospital practice," he says. "It's gone. I'm radioactive; people are afraid to be around me." And he still hasn't gotten over the trauma of being set up and having his daughter nearly killed. "If some of this stuff had shaken out differently, I could have gone to jail, and my daughter could have died," he said. "These bastards were plotting my professional murder, and they almost got away with it."

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¡ask a mexican!

» GUSTAVO ARELLANO

DEAR MEXICAN: In the past, you have defended illegal immigrants by arguing they (paraphrasing one of your previous columns) will do the jobs *gabachos* won't do for the same wages. I agree. I have a white-collar job, so I'm totally content to benefit from the low prices brought about by an uneducated underclass unprotected by American labor laws, content in the knowledge that no Mexican will ever take *mi trabajo*. But now this DREAM Act comes along, encouraging them to go to college, and my job's up for grabs, too? I already have enough competition from the Chinese and the Indians! What possible benefit could this legislation have for a guy such as me? (And you know they're just going to spend 95 percent of their time in school chanting, "*Sí, se puede*" anyway.)

NIGHTMARE Act Is More Like It

DEAR *GABACHO*: I'd rather have college kids chant, "*Sí, se puede*" than join a pointless fraternity/sorority or get blotto at said pointless fraternity/sorority parties. All that said, though, you don't have to worry about DREAMers taking your job—you'll continue to have your middle-class lifestyle as these DREAMers catapult over you and become your boss because they all possess the drive, ambition and talent that *gabachos* used to exhibit in college before it became finishing school for high schoolers. Better learn how to grovel to *el jefe* in English and *Español, chulo*!

DEAR MEXICAN: I have noticed Mexican women will put up with being called a *ruca, heina, vieja,* "my old lady," even sometimes such culinary terms as "My little pupusa" or chimichanga. But when you call her a "torta," you are in one major fight. Why? What is so bad about tortas?

Don One-liners

DEAR *GABACHO*: You're calling her "fat." Tortas are fat Mexican sandwiches made on French rolls. Want to culinarily woo her? Go old-school and call her a "hot tamale," or go postmodern and deem her your memela—TRUST ME.

DEAR MEXICAN: Sometimes when I'm eating a burrito, the bottom and becomes saturated with moisture, so the tortilla breaks and stuff falls out. Is this the result of a lack of burrito-eating skill, an improperly made burrito, or just the way it's supposed to be?

Chipotle Chingón

DEAR NEIGHBOR OF MEXICANS: Don't be a Mexican and accept the world the way it's supposed to be, ESPECIALLY the art of the burrito. *Gabachos* are so clueless they think burritos are supposed to vomit out their contents as though they are coeds in pre-narco Acapulco—*¡que pendejos!* A true burrito is an immaculate cylindrical god, wrapped up as tight as bacon around a hot dog, its structure so sound you can throw it through the air in a spiral, and it won't explode. This isn't even a question of size, of beans and rice erupting out of the flour tortilla because there's simply nowhere else to go: The largest burritos on Earth are those made in the Mission District in San Francisco (where Chipotle's founder found his "inspiration" for the chain's burritos), where the Mission burrito is a way of life, larger than bricks, wrapped tight in foil, and never explodes (and a shout-out to my favorite *taquería*—that's what burrito emporiums are called in San Francisco—in the Mission, El Castillito!). If a burrito gets so soggy at the bottom it disintegrates, then the maker either put too much salsa/guacamole/sour cream in it, or the meat's so damn greasy it's not worth eating. If your burrito disintegrates, demand a refund—or, better yet, sue the business owner for defaming the burrito's good *nombre*.

ASK THE MEXICAN

at themexican@askamexican.net, be his fan on Facebook, follow him on Twitter or ask him a video question at youtube.com/askamexicano!

HeyYou!

» ANONYMOUS

BOB AUL

Cookie Hater

You were the man who decided to not simply decline my daughters' offer of Girl Scout cookies. No, you had to tell us why. You used to buy the cookies, especially the Thin Mints, you explained, but you stopped when you found out where the money was going. That was in direct conflict with your beliefs, you said. "You know what I'm talking about, right?" you asked me. I told you I didn't but thanked you for your time. But you persisted, telling me I should look into where the money goes, that I should check out a particular website.

What I didn't tell you was that I *know* where the money from cookie sales goes (the girls get a percentage, as does the local council and the bakery that made the cookies). But that wasn't your problem. The national organization supports partnerships with Planned Parenthood when it comes to education. There are people in leadership roles who are gay, and there are people we hold up as role models whom you likely consider radical and feminist. I don't have an issue with any of that. But when your young son comes to my door to sell his popcorn, when I tell him, "No, thank you," please know it's because I can't support your Boy Scout. The beliefs of his family and likely his charter are in conflict with my own.

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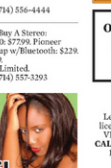

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ACE HOFFMAN HAS SPENT YEARS FIGHTING THE SAN ONOFRE NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION. NOW, THE IMPOSSIBLE IS ON HIS HORIZON: ITS PERMANENT SHUTDOWN

"Do you see over yonder, friend Sancho, [those] hulking giants? I intend to do battle with them and slay them . . . for this is a righteous war, and the removal of so foul a brood from off the face of the earth is a service God will bless."
"Take care, sir," cried Sancho. "Those over there are not giants, but windmills."

—MIGUEL DE CERVANTES, ***DON QUIXOTE,*** **1605**

TILTING AT

BY NED MADDEN

THE PACIFIC OCEAN gleams like liquid diamonds as I steer my Toyota up the 5 freeway at sunset under a clear, silvery, gloaming sky.

I'm headed home to San Clemente to meet with a modern-day Man of La Mancha (or, in this case, of nearby Carlsbad)—Russell "Ace" Hoffman, a guy in the know about nuclear power, a defender of human life and the environment, a true grand tilter at mighty nuke atom-splitters. Ace's life mission: generally, to end mankind's use of nuclear power, which he equates to the 14th-century Black Plague in its destructive impact on human bodies and society.

"Males in the northern hemisphere are said to piss out about a million atoms of plutonium every DAY of their lives," Hoffman wrote for a *Counterpunch* article in 2007. "Just from one 1963 NASA space-probe accident."

More specifically, though, Ace wants to permanently close Southern California's San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)—or "Nuclear *WASTE* Generating Station," as he terms it.

"What," asks this contempo Don Quixote, "will we do with thousands of tons of lethal spent fuel sitting on that site for at least 300 more years, threatening our lives and livelihoods?"

Opposing Ace is SONGS' owner and operator, Southern California Edison (SCE), a Fortune 500 power goliath ($12.3 billion annual revenues, 20,000 employees) and state-protected energy behemoth. SCE is headquartered in Rosemead, east of downtown Los Angeles, a comfortable 62 miles from SONGS and a good 10 miles outside SCE's self-designated 50-mile "Ingestion Pathway Zone" (IPZ) specified for SONGS emergencies—in other words, Ground Zero. In 1996, SCE made itself the largest subsidiary of a holding company it calls Edison International. Slogan: "Life. Powered by Edison."

Reality: SCE failed early in the fission fest, way back in the mid-1950s. The company built the ill-fated Santa Susana Sodium Reactor Experimental (SRE) nuclear power plant near Moorpark in Ventura County. Owner Atomics International even fabricated plutonium fuel there. In 1959, the plant's reactors partially melted down, a California first. Fifty-four years later, the Old Susana site remains contaminated.

Edison moved on to build SONGS. In 1968, Unit 1, a Westinghouse pressurized water reactor (PWR) began operations. SCE built Units 2 and 3 in the 1970s (and in a portent of troubles to come, Bechtel Corporation, the nation's largest construction-and-engineering company, installed a 420-ton nuclear-reactor vessel backward). Unit 2 went online on Aug. 8, 1983, with Unit 3 following on April 1, 1984. They've been offline since Jan. 31, 2012, when a "leaking incident" damaged equipment and led to a release of radioactive steam into the environment.

Radiation entered the air, soil, beach, plants and water surrounding SONGS, just 8 goddamn miles from my fucking front door.

My family numbers among the 74 million people who live within that 50-mile SONGS IPZ. Welcome to the SoCal glow club, Long Beach, LA, Riverside and San Diego! Eat, drink and be wary.

But don't worry, advises SCE, which claims our biggest power facility has operated peacefully and "cleanly" ever since first fission, providing ratepayers with nearly 20 percent of SoCal's electricity while sparing everyone the deleterious effects of burning coal: tons of smog-producing pollutants and greenhouse-gas carbon emissions. SCE's unstated SONGS business-value proposition: nuclear pollution isn't nearly as bad as coal pollution and global warming.

Ace Hoffman perceives a more sinister scenario about his adversaries, who include SCE, which owns 78.2 percent of SONGS; Sempra Energy's San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), which owns 20 percent; and the city

of Riverside, which owns 1.8 percent. "San Onofre is owned and operated by belligerent liars," Ace e-ranted to me. "They lie to each other, they lie to the media, they lie to the public, they lie to the NRC [Nuclear Regulatory Commission], and they lie to themselves, thinking 'a little radiation is safe' or even 'a little radiation is good for you.'"

Senator Barbara Boxer also doubts SCE management's veracity. The chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has called for a new investigation of SCE and a shutdown of SONGS based on information in a document from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which built the plan's faulty replacement steam generators, installed in 2010. According to Boxer, the document indicates that Edison and Mitsubishi were aware in advance of potential safety problems with the generators.

But SONGS survives in its South County haunt due entirely to SCE's political prowess and the Big Nuke propaganda machine. The heavily subsidized $33 billion nuclear-power industry is small but powerful because it's really just a money-losing beard for the military-industrial-congressional complex and its $56 billion-per-year U.S. nuclear-weapons programs. The commercial nuclear-power market was invented in the 1950s by the U.S. government to provide plutonium for nuclear warheads. Making electricity for consumers was just an (insane) excuse.

U.S. taxpayers mostly support the nuclear-power industry. In fact, Michele Boyd, legislative director of the nonprofit consumer-rights group Public Citizen's energy program, has called nuclear power a massive swindle of the American public put together by the federal government in collusion with ostensibly "for-profit" nuclear-plant operators. The heart of this fraud is the Price-Anderson Nuclear Industries Indemnity Act, which artificially limits the amount of primary insurance that nuclear operators must carry—an uncalculated, indirect subsidy in terms of insurance premiums they don't have to pay.

Small wonder that SCE writes on its website, "Nuclear energy continues to play an important role in providing low-cost, clean energy."

True, if by "low-cost," it means extraordinarily expensive, and by "clean," it means a highly contaminated fuel that can go kablooey at any moment.

THE PROSPECT OF potential disaster at my own uranium-drenched, neighborhood, nuke plant roils my mind about SONGS—and Chernobyl and Fukushima and Three Mile Island—as I head north through the gathering darkness for my meeting with Hoffman.

I began corresponding with him following my 1999 *Weekly* article "The Death Ray," about the dynamic area at the San Diego-Orange County border and its secretive military-industrial complex industry in the badlands east of San Clemente. I mentioned San Onofre as a freakish element of what I call "The Valley of the Weird." As I take a closer look at SONGS, there's no better plant tour guide than Hoffman.

A plethora of Orange County and San Diego groups has sprung up to fight SONGS over the years—the most active include Don Leichtling's Decommission San Onofre, Gary and Laurie Headrick's San Clemente Green, Gene Stone's Residents for a Safe Environment (ROSE), Donna Gilmore's San Onofre Safety, and Ray Lutz's Citizens Oversight Projects (COPs). But it's Hoffman who has captured the public's imagination. NASA's 1997 launch to Saturn of its Cassini-Huygens robotic orbiter powered by 72 pounds of plutonium-238 motivated him to graduate from mere letter-writing to local San Diego-area newspapers to loud activism. And then in 2001, on the same day that SCE told the media that activists such as Hoffman "don't understand the laws of physics," workers at the SONGS plant, in an apparent failure to comprehend the laws of gravity, dropped an 80,000-pound crane.

"The comment and the crane were the downfall of SanO, which became my sole focus," recalls Hoffman. "Having fought a planetary attack by NASA, I decided to follow the 'think global, act local' creed and concentrate my activities on shutting down the plant. That was more than a million pounds of nuke waste ago."

In 2008, Hoffman was diagnosed with bladder cancer. Because he never smoked, he suspected radiation as the cause. He decided to make a contribution of the knowledge about fighting nuclear power he had accumulated during 40 years of anti-nuke research, publishing what many in the movement rank among the most

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

important and accessible textbooks of the Nuclear Age, *The Code Killers: Why DNA and ionizing radiation are a dangerous mix . . . An expose of the nuclear industry.* You can buy it from his frequently updated blog, Ace Hoffman's Nuclear Failures Report (acehoffman.blogspot.com).

Hoffman's thesis: nuclear-power plants produce immensely damaging ionizing radiation (from gamma rays and the alpha or beta particles emitted by decaying radioactive elements), which emits enough energy to break countless chemical bonds in the human body's 50 trillion to 100 trillion cells. Exposure to ionizing radiation can alter cell DNA, which expresses as birth defects and cancer. According to Hoffman, ubiquitous nuke plants and their radioactive output—the byproducts of uranium atomic fission—wreak havoc on bodies, destroying our tissues, organs and bones, sickening and killing us.

He's no desk-bound academic. His book is a polemic to employ as a weapon in the battle against nuclear power. As such, it places the author squarely in the middle of an ever-expanding, national, anti-nuke movement, one in which he's become a sort of Cassandra: Last year, SONGS was shut down due to "the leaking incident." For Hoffman, what began with writing letters to the editor and providing the lone voice of opposition at regulatory meetings has become a "storm of activism," as increasing numbers people seek him out to learn about the dangers of nuclear power, in general, and, in particular, the truth about San Onofre.

THE JUNIOR EINSTEINS who run dumps such as SONGS are brilliant at controlling nuclear fission and making water really, REALLY HOT, enough to spin wheels and make electricity. From there, though, even *they* will admit to utter cluelessness.

"Radioactive decay is not triggered . . . and therefore, science does not know how to control it," explains Dr. Gordon Edwards, president of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility (CCNR). "We have no mechanism for speeding up, slowing down, starting or stopping radioactive decay. That's why radioactive wastes are such an enormous problem. If radioactive particles escape into the environment and enter the human body, they destroy cells. It's like throwing a grenade into a computer."

According to Physicians for Social Responsibility, nuclear fuel is "dirty," dangerous and deadly throughout its life cycle—mining, refining, purifying, using and burying. The core of a nuclear reactor contains both water and assemblies of fuel rods clad in zirconium and containing ceramic pellets of uranium-235-enriched nuclear fuel. This fuel is bombarded with neutrons to set off controlled nuclear reactions. These reactions super-heat the water, creating 550-degree Fahrenheit steam, which powers a turbine, generating electricity.

Unfortunately for all life on Earth, this process also creates poisons—uranium's hellish bastard "daughters." The approximate half-lives of some of the isotopes in spent nuclear fuel: strontium-90, 28 years; cesium-137, 30 years; plutonium-239, 24,000 years; cesium-135, 2.3 million years; iodine-129, 15.7 million years. The spent fuel rods from a nuclear reactor are the most radioactive of all nuclear wastes, giving off 99 percent of the total radiation. This waste requires isolation from our ecosystem for 10,000 to 100,000 years before it sufficiently deteriorates due to natural radioactivity.

Spent fuel rods are removed from reactors and placed in crowded (with other rods), 35-foot deep pools of water and allowed to cool down for five to 10 years before being moved into "dry cask" storage. These casks—SONGS hosts about four dozen—are 20 feet tall, 10 feet wide and weigh 100 tons, 15 tons of which is used reactor core assemblies.

Then the casks . . . sit, biding their smoldering time, of which they have plenty. SONGS has accumulated 2,000 tons to 4,000 tons of the vile stuff, and if it ever catches fire, it can explode and shoot potentially fatal debris into our air and water. SCE's take?

"The NRC has determined this storage technology is safe for at least 100 years. The best location for a central, U.S. nuclear-waste depository is a matter of continuing political debate. But there is settled science supporting the long-term safety of deep, geologic disposal."

Note how SCE has made SONGS' spent fuel a 2113 problem. And "settled" by whom? We've only been burying this junk since 1942, when the first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction took place. Moreover, no permanent storage site exists for spent nuclear fuel. The feds reneged on promises to haul it away. And the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report in August 2012 that declared, "Spent nuclear fuel . . . is one of the most hazardous substances created by humans."

The U.S. can't dispose of the nearly 70,000 metric tons of spent fuel currently stored in 33 states from 104 reactors at 64 plants. It was supposed to go to a repository located deep under Nevada's Yucca Mountain ($10 billion down that hole to date), but Nevadans refuse to risk turning their state into a radioactive, nuclear cauldron. The GAO found that new facilities would take up to 40 years before they could accept spent fuel. Meanwhile, spent fuel stored onsite at commercial nuclear plants increases by about 2,000 metric tons annually.

For something with such a monumentally negative impact, uranium-pellet-filled fuel rods don't deliver much value—each produces energy for only six years, and according to SCE, nuclear plants use only 5 percent of the fuel's energy. It's *not* low-cost, clean energy—but it *is* wildly inefficient.

I SPEED THROUGH the winding emptiness of the 200-square-mile Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, which owns the tract of land SONGS occupies. Oh, those jarheads . . .

Camp Pendleton emerged in 1942 when the U.S. government—reeling in panic from Pearl Harbor—essentially confiscated 122,798 acres of Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores from its owners and created the country's largest Marine Corps base. In May 1964, the Department of the Navy granted SCE a 60-year easement for use of the site to build and operate SONGS.

ACE HOFFMAN AT REST

BRENDAN KLEIN

Construction of Units 2 and 3 spanned a decade, going beyond the budget by billions of dollars because of earthquake-related design revisions and regulatory delays. The final price at startup for the two reactors totaled $4.5 billion, according to the California Council on Science and Technology. The pricey corpses of both units' cores will fester onsite forever. After operating Unit 1 for 24 years, SCE decommissioned and dismantled it in 1992 because it didn't want to spend $125 million in required modifications. The old reactor remains onsite, cocooned in concrete and still as radioactive as hell.

When I phoned the Marines to ask about protecting the base's daytime population of 70,000, I was told to call SCE. Later, I did find a brochure on the base website explaining evacuation procedures should SONGS experience an emergency.

I zip through the unmanned California Highway Patrol-U.S. Border Patrol San Onofre traffic checkpoint, come up over a rise, and there it is: SONGS. It looms on my left, next to the Pacific Ocean, which backdrops the plant's familiar, 160-foot, twin, hemispherical, concrete containment towers. (Yeah, I know: They look like Hollywood bolt-on breast implants, but I'm not playin'.) The place is squat, gray and homely in a haute gauche, bleak-noir, industro-power-plant style, 45 years ancient and well past its "close by" date. In 2000, Edison wrangled license extensions to 2020. The containment structures for both units are made of 4.5-foot-thick reinforced concrete. Inside each structure is an 8-inch-thick steel reactor vessel that houses the reactor.

The incongruity of seeing this woeful monstrosity on that magnificent shore always stuns. An aged, "embrittled," crumbling relic of the U.S. government's 1950s and 1960s nuclear-power-plant-building mania, SONGS hunkers forlorn and ugly in a seismic fault zone near San Clemente's south end on 84 acres of beautiful beachfront . . . now irredeemably lost.

'Nofre's a defiled dragon's lair of nuclear detritus—the flow of the global-nuclear-waste stream dead-ended here, never to go away. But now it's lit up to make the domes, outbuildings, poles, pipes, wires, cyclone fence, brick security wall, et al., look bright and beguiling at dusk. Here's a house that knows how to pay a light bill.

Increasingly, though, there are fewer and fewer folks home, as the place empties out. In August 2012, SCE cut 730 employees, taking the plant workforce down to 1,500—job-loss hits to the local economy that will only continue.

Along with the domes, I can see turbines, outflow/intake pipes, a too-low sea wall, control-room areas, a switchyard, an emergency diesel generator room (all bunched up), water-storage tanks for the emergency cooling systems and, the BIG trouble here, spent-fuel pool areas and dry-storage casks. Trestles surfers and San Onofre State Beach campers see this gruesome sight every day, with little comprehension of its magnitude as an economic, ecological disaster.

SONGS squanders heat on an unimaginable scale, dissipating enough into the sky above the plant each day to warm a city for a year. A 1994 Friends of the Earth study showed that a nuke plant must operate for 18 years before realizing 1 net calorie of energy. The nuke never pays off.

'Nofre lays its worst punishments on the ocean. To cool the reactors, it sucks in 2 million gallons of ocean water every minute, 1.6 billion gallons each day—an intake equal to a lake-sized square mile of ocean 12 feet deep. This prodigious misuse of water devastates local sea life. The Sierra Club calls SONGS and its sister California nuke plant Diablo Canyon "Giant Fish Blenders." At San Onofre each year, 121 tons of midwater fish are entrained (sucked into the cooling system itself). Unit 3 alone annually entrains an average of more than 3.1 *billion* individual aquatic organisms.

SONGS is a major polluter. "The Radioactive Effluent and Environmental Reports for San Onofre Units 2 and 3, 2005-2011" reveals in-depth details about the plant's impact on the environ-

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ment. It has state and federal permission to release its "radwaste" into the air and water. In 2010, Edison piped highly diluted radwaste into the ocean for 550 hours (while releasing numerous low-level radionuclides into the air for a total of 44 hours). Edison's documents provided to the NRC reveal that SONGS released 34 different radionuclides, including plutonium, strontium-90 and cesium-137, all extremely injurious to living tissue.

Then there are "accidents." In 2006, tritium reportedly leaked into the groundwater beneath San Onofre, prompting the temporary closure of one area drinking-water well.

And SONGS isn't such a great place to work. On March 2, 2010, the NRC sent SONGS managers a letter describing a "chilling effect" among plant employees who feared retaliation from management if they reported safety concerns.

San Onofre has a filthy physical environment, "full of dirt, trash, clutter, cigarette butts and unidentified tripping hazards," according to Bethann Chambers, wife of SONGS whistleblower James Chambers, who worked at Units 2 and 3. "The (work) culture at SONGS is sick," she wrote on Dec. 9, 2010, in a long online post titled "The Truth About San Onofre From the Wife of a Licensed Nuclear Reactor Operator."

"This is the best word to describe the toxic work environment at the plant," added Chambers, who characterized the SONGS workforce as "three-tiered"—a management "Good Old Boys Club" (because it includes very few women) at the top, a second tier of "Company Stooges" and a bottom tier of "Worker Bees."

The result, according to Chambers: "If the workers at the nuclear-power plant are afraid to raise concerns, then the health and safety of the public is in jeopardy."

In addition to the shutdown, 2012 brought SONGS more drama than a Kardashian-Olsen twins cage match. In January, an outside contractor who was leaning over to retrieve a flashlight while working near Unit 2's reactor pool lost his balance and fell in. He survived. In May, Edison revealed a case of flawed safety equipment and lax oversight regarding the reactors' emergency-backup generators. The next month, a routine NRC inspection of SONGS found "security deficiencies." In December, fearing possible "employee-related sabotage," SONGS officials began investigating why they found coolant mixed with oil in their safety equipment.

Imagine a delinquent 8-year-old behind the wheel of the 700 mph turbojet-propelled Fossett LSR hypercar packed tight with nuclear explosives, trying to set a world land-speed record, 24/7 for eternity. That's SONGS.

But none of the above forced the current shutdown. Dumb, doomed, double-domed SONGS has been closed for a year thanks to that " leaking incident," which involved heat-transfer tubes in the plant's Unit 3 nuclear-reactor steam generators. These convert heat from the reactor cores into steam to drive turbines and generate electricity. Tubes in a year-old, poorly designed, 65-foot tall, 640-ton steam generator ruptured.

SCE downplayed the shutdown "incident" in a June 7 press release last year. "Both SONGS units are currently safely shut down for inspections, analysis and testing. Unit 2 was taken out of service Jan. 9 for a planned outage. Unit 3 was safely taken offline Jan. 31 after station operators detected a leak in a steam-generator tube."

What actually took place was that several heat-transfer tubes, severely damaged by extended heavy vibration and denting, burst and vented hundreds of gallons of super-heated, highly pressurized, radioactive steam. Alarms sounded, and operators scrambled far into the next day before finally doing a "cold" shutdown of the entire system. They had to evacuate the turbine plant and surrounding areas and declare an "Alert" ("an event that could decrease the plant's level of safety," in SONGSspeak).

"Edison played fast and loose by making radical design changes and ducking the rules," said Kendra Ulrich, nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth. "The result was the most rapid breakdown of such replacement steam generators in the history of the U.S. nuclear industry. If Edison had followed the rules, an NRC license review would have found these glaring defects, and the lives of millions of people would not have been put at risk, nor would hundreds of millions of dollars have been squandered."

Edison sees things differently. In June 2012, SCE executives claimed that the cause of what they call the "unexpected" tube-to-tube wear was "fluid elastic instability" or excessive tube vibration. That's like saying a decked prizefighter got knocked out by the canvas when his head hit it.

I CROSS UNDER SONGS' overhead power lines that trail off into the hills, and in a 65-mph instant, I'm happily past the gnarly old plant and rolling toward San Clemente, beauty to 'Nofre's beast. I park in an unremarkable parking lot and head into our meeting place. I inhale the aromas of warm, delicious Mexican food being enjoyed by a noisy dinner-hour crowd. It's early for our meeting, so I grab a table in the back of the restaurant and order coffee. The stack of materials in my folder has a slick, four-color brochure from SCE titled "Emergency Preparedness Information for the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)."

SCE's emergency master plan? Listen for the sirens—a long, steady, continuous, oscillating, awful, blaring wail—sounding for two to five minutes each time, turn on the radio or TV (DO NOT call 911!), swallow potassium-iodide pills (which residents of San Clemente, Dana Point and San Juan Capistrano can get free of charge from those cities), and then head out into the monumental, immobile traffic jam that will be blocking the few roads out of town. Unwritten tips: abandon car, start walking, avoid airborne radioactive plume, head for desert as though the mad hermit name-

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TILTING AT 'NOFRE

sake of 'Nofre, Onuphrius himself, don't return for 10,000 years.

I look over my notes on Hoffman: age 55, a Connecticut native, the son of professors, some college, an elopement with wife Sharon. He moved here in 1991, first setting eyes on San Onofre while driving south on the 5 freeway.

"I remember thinking, 'That's a nuclear reactor. What's it doing HERE?'" he wrote in an email.

He's still searching for the answer. For years, Hoffman has been studying California's energy issues. A computer programmer and software designer, he owns and operates the Animated Software Co., which specializes in educational software.

As he comes through the door, I recognize Hoffman from his online photo: a middle-aged engineer; 6 feet tall; 175 pounds; blue eyes; a days-old beard; short, brownish-blond hair sprinkled with gray and parted on the left. He's casually dressed in jeans and an open-collar cotton shirt. He arrives in the company of his petite, smiling wife and a man whom Hoffman introduces as Torgen Johnson of Solano Beach. The trio belongs to the DAB Safety Team, an anti-SONGS group that speaks out publicly against the plant.

"If you had to sum up your message to the people of Southern California, what would it be?" I ask.

"It's simple," Hoffman says, jabbing his fork above his plate for emphasis. "Nuclear power kills."

He looks around the room at the laughing, talking families eating their meals. "Thousands have already died from Chernobyl, and thousands will die from Fukushima, but their deaths are scattered in time and all over the planet, and so the 'health physicists' ignore those deaths, denying any connection to any nuclear accident," he continues. "But realistic data by highly qualified scientists, in study after study, proves the connection beyond doubt. So don't make San Onofre another Fukushima. San Onofre is shut down now. Let's keep it that way."

What's going on at SONGS?

"San Onofre is currently shut down because its steam generators are busted," Hoffman says. "But that's not all that's wrong." He begins ticking off some demerits: "Its fuel pools are full. It's in a tsunami inundation zone AND an earthquake zone. It's old and decrepit. Its employees are intimidated by management and falsify reports and are afraid to report safety problems. Management likewise has its back against the wall and is desperate to prove it can restart the reactors somehow, despite the engineering logic against it. Nobody wants to lose face or a job. Every state agency claims only the NRC can 'force' San Onofre to close, and the NRC has never met a nuclear power plant it didn't like."

What can ordinary people do about this?

"The citizens who don't want Fukushima USA to happen here are in a bind, that's for sure," he says. "But dry casks aren't the solution. Shutdown is the most important and only logical next step."

What compelling reasons does SCE have to keep the old place going?

"When San Onofre is operating, it's 'easy money' for SCE," Hoffman says. "The reactors, when operating, produce $1 million per day in revenue for their owners. *That* clouds their thinking. All for a bit of electricity, which is easily obtained in safer ways."

Security is always an issue at SONGS. The place sits right next to a major freeway. It's on the water. It's directly beneath the San Diego-LA airports' flight path. Two of the 9/11 al-Qaeda hijackers drove by on their way to the airport. I saw an ad for a security guard at the plant that required only a GED.

"Nuclear-power plants are likely to be targets of terrorist attacks in that they are considered a legitimate target of war as defined by the United States military," Hoffman adds. "We bombed power-generation systems in Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan. Furthermore, we used nuclear weapons—depleted uranium—and caused widespread environmental damage. Lastly, every military scholar knows that the best way to cripple a force is to wound as many of the enemy as possible. Destroying San Onofre would do that. People would die, but slowly, and caregivers would be severely strained around the country from just *one* radiological catastrophe."

As I listen to Hoffman's surprisingly calm and measured responses, I keep waiting for the passionate flamethrower who sends those lit-up emails and posts those angry anti-nuker denunciations. But I'm not seeing or hearing any bold bitterness, harsh outbursts or rage against the nuke machine. Instead, here's a polite guy with a good sense of humor and an engineer's composed, analytical air. In conversation, Hoffman uses logic to examine a situation; he seems to appreciate and respect any displays of intelligence in his adversaries. He comes across as an ordinary man who just wants to help solve one of the planet's biggest problems.

Hoffman's demeanor is testing my Don Quixote comparison—no trace in this guy of the gaunt, slightly mad ascetic set on bringing order to a tumultuous world. I ask him what he thinks of the Don Quixote analogy.

He laughs. "Well, nuclear power plants *aren't* an imaginary enemy, but even so, the lance would be a laser and the horse a mountain bike. Other than that . . ." He trails off, smiling.

I pitched this story as an interview with Ace Hoffman, reigning champion of the fight against San Onofre, I tell him. Does he agree?

He laughs. "Reigning champion . . . champion of what? It's the team that is a hundred times more powerful than I ever was by myself, but besides that, we haven't actually won *anything*, so I'm the champion of *nothing*!"

I received no response from SCE's media department to my phone calls and email messages seeking comment about Hoffman and his SONGS-related activities. So I ask Hoffman instead: What do the folks at Edison think of you?

Another broad grin. "They say, 'We love you, Ace!'"

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saturday>
THIS AIN'T YOUR GRANDMOTHER'S BINGO

page 18
SUNDAY
ONE MAN REVISES THE CUBISM MOVEMENT

page 18
MONDAY
REASSEMBLING INDIE POP, PIXEL BY PIXEL

*calendar

page 18
TUESDAY
A ROMANTIC TRAGEDY TAKES CENTER STAGE

page 19
WEDNESDAY
TAKING "SUFFERING ARTIST" TO ANOTHER LEVEL

MARY ALICE THOMPSON

fri/02/22

[CONCERT]

Full-Fledged Rawk

CJ Ramone

The former Marine who took over for bassist Dee Dee Ramone during that last zig-zaggy seven years of what was basically the end of the foundational band for American punk rock, CJ Ramone not only walked away intact, but he kept playing and pushing on with his own not-as-Ramones-y-as-you-might-think rock & roll, culminating in his newest and just-about-out album, *Reconquista*. (From the previews, you think it's more like the Dead Boys or the Stooges.) Recorded in OC with guests such as Steve Soto, Billy Zoom and Frank Agnew, the album just crossed the 100 percent mark on crowdfund site PledgeMusic—good news because now you'll be getting even more of CJ than anyone thought was mathematically possible!

CJ Ramone (with Steve Soto, Dan Root and Dave Hidalgo), plus special guests, at Alex's Bar, 2913 E. Anaheim St., Long Beach, (562) 434-8292; www.alexsbar.com. 9 p.m. $10. 21+. —CHRIS ZIEGLER

[FILM]

Clear Waters

Transparentsea and *Ode to California*

In honor of the newly formed Laguna Bluebelt Coalition, a marine-life and environmental-activist organization, the Laguna Beach Film Society presents the 2013 Winter Documentary Series focusing on the importance and urgency of ocean awareness. This session screens two passionate films: *Transparentsea: The Desert Whale Recordings* by Justin Krumb and *Ode to California* by Patrick Trefz. *Transparentsea* is about the travels of a creative, musical group of activists as it dedicates itself to communicating our local coastal environmental concerns. The second film of the evening, *Ode to California*, is a short, experimental, surreal doc about surfing in the wilderness. The directors of both films will be in attendance for a Q&A session after the screenings.

Winter Documentary Series: Ocean Awareness, featuring *Transparentsea: The Desert Whale Recordings* and *Ode to California*, at the Forum Theatre, 650 Laguna Canyon Rd., Laguna Beach, (949) 494-8971; www.lagunaartmuseum.org. 7 p.m. $5-$6. —ERIN DEWITT

sat/02/23

[FILM]

Drugs and Opera

Traffic

The Long Beach Opera remains the coolest opera company in SoCal, and it's because it does things such as screen Steven Soderbergh's Oscar-winning, drug-smuggling masterpiece *Traffic* by way of introducing performances of the opera *Camelia la Tejana—Only the Truth (Unicamente la Verdad)* by Mexico's foremost female composer, Gabriela Ortiz. It's an opera about drug smuggling. That's one you don't want to miss, no matter how lowbrow you might be. Before raising your standards at the opera next month, however, be sure to prep yourself with the cinematic version of narco-busting at the Art, if only to swoon over Benicio del Toro once again, and remember when Catherine Zeta-Jones could act.

MORE » ONLINE
OCWEEKLY.COM

Traffic at the Art Theatre, 2025 E. Fourth St., Long Beach, (562) 438-5435; www.arttheatrelongbeach.com. 11:30 a.m. $10. —STACY DAVIES

[GAME]

Lucky Numbers

REBEL BINGO

The best things come from jolly, old England: the Beatles, our legal system, bangers and mash. And it appears as though this "special relationship" with our friends across the pond is about to get a bit more awesome. Straight from the hippest part of London (a drunken party in the basement of a church hall) comes Rebel Bingo, a wacky twist on the popular game for the senior-citizen sector. But Rebel Bingo features one golden rule: There are no rules. There's drinking, music and reckless dancing. It's a wild party, with bingo for young people—sort of. Play, or don't play. Party, or don't party. It doesn't really matter. Just go and have fun and possibly win some prizes. God save the Queen.

Rebel Bingo at the Yost Theater, 307 N. Spurgeon St., Santa Ana, (888) 862-9573; www.yosttheater.com. 7 p.m. $4-$20. 21+. —AMANDA PARSONS

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sun/02/24

[CONCERT]

Finely Tuned

Sundays At Soka

There's *intense* (North Sea oil-rig workers, Humvee drivers in Helmand Province), there's what-fucking-day-of-the-week-is-it? (hospital interns and Google code writers) . . . and there's pianist Orli Shaham. The daughter of scientists, she studied at Juilliard while at Columbia, dazzled as a duetist with violinist brother Gil, has headlined around the world as a soloist (La Scala, Milan; Toscana, Florence), helped create the hugely popular Baby Got Bach program in New York (toddlers meet Johann Sebastian and love him), raises 5-year-old twin sons with hubby David Robertson (music director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra), and performs just about any damn place she wishes. Catch this human whirlwind in a memorable afternoon of Mozart with Pacific Symphony. Uh, Soka it to us, baby!

Sundays At Soka with the Pacific Symphony at Soka Performing Arts Center, 1 University Dr., Aliso Viejo; www.soka.edu. 3 p.m. $48-$58. —JACK GRIMSHAW

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[ART]

On Display

FOCUS ON ART

You have to admire Alejandro Otero, who tried his hand at revising a movement as seminal as Cubism. The Venezuelan visionary came of age in the era of Picasso, and though a skilled painter, in the 1960s, he shifted his focus to civic sculptures such as *Delta Solar*, a massive, stainless-steel structure configured in a triangular grid. Otero's work, which exhibits a fascination with squares and grids, paid homage to technology and native traditions. Head to the Museum of Latin American Art, and at 1 p.m., be in the lobby so docent Khara Cloutier can guide your exploration.

Focus on Art at the Museum of Latin American Art, 628 Alamitos Ave., Long Beach, (562) 437-1689; www.molaa.org. 1 p.m. $6-$9. —BRANDON FERGUSON

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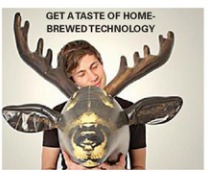
mon/02/25

[CONCERT]

Out of Bounds

Ramona Falls

Brent Knopf was the polymath co-founder of Portland's Menomena, the impressively (or was that intimidatingly?) creative band who would reverse-engineer live songs from an insane collection of custom loops—kind of like an indie rock band deciding to reproduce every detail of *Paul's Boutique* live, except even more daring. But in 2011, Knopf left Menomena (amiably!) for his own Ramona Falls, a band who have been taking indie-pop apart and reassembling it pixel by pixel for two full albums now. Does anyone



reading this like Nick Nicely? Because he did what Knopf does—match imagination and home-brewed technology to make songs that know no limits.

Ramona Falls at the Constellation Room at the Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana, (714) 957-0600; www.observatoryoc.com. 8 p.m. $12. All ages. —CHRIS ZIEGLER

tue/02/26

[OPERA]

Hitting a High Note

Puccini's *Tosca*

Entering a new phase of musical performance, Pacific Symphony's opera initiative continues to soar after the immense success of last year's semi-staged portrayal of Puccini's *La Boheme*. This year, it takes on the master composer's exquisite, grand tragedy *Tosca*. Starring Claire Rutter in the lead role, this romantic torrent gets wings from both the Pacific Chorale and Southern California Children's Chorus, creating an ethereal, haunting rendition of a tale of love, jealousy, deceit and murder. With the orchestra not in a sub-level pit, but rather onstage, and the singers in front of the musicians, this opera classic floods audiences with the full impact of Puccini's powerful music and story.

Puccini's *Tosca* at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa, (714) 556-2787; www.scfta.org. 8 p.m.; also Sat. $25-$185. —ERIN DEWITT

wed/02/27

[COMEDY]

Laughing Fit

Nick Swardson

One of our favorite comedians comes through Orange County this week, making a stop at the Irvine Improv. Whether he's talking about applying for a job at Taco Bell (and how amazing the food is—but only when you're wasted), epic party texts or the "drunk chick spiral," Nick Swardson's standup schtick is consistently fucking hysterical. Over the years, he has played eccentric roles in more than two dozen films—though we decided to skip *Bucky Larson: Born to Be a Star*, movies such as *Grandma's Boy* and *30 Minutes or Less* continue to find spots in our Netflix queue. And even though his comedic career continues to propel forward, to us, he'll always be Terry, the gay, roller-skating prostitute.

Nick Swardson at the Irvine Improv, 81 Fortune Dr., Irvine, (949) 854-5455; www.improv.com. 8 p.m.; also Tues. $25. 18+. —ERIN DEWITT

[ART]

Going Big

'Richard Jackson: Ain't Painting a Pain'

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American contemporary artist Richard Jackson is hailed as "one of the most radical artists" of the past half-century. His current collection, now on display at the Orange County Museum of Art, features his famous interpretation of "action" painting in a series of drastic, arresting, room-size installations. There's massive sculpture, life-size re-creations of everyday scenes covered in vivid hues, anthropomorphic painting devices, and massive collections of stacked canvases. Some of the pieces are showing for the first time in the United States, and one is a sculpture that was conceived decades ago but never built. Catch this imaginative collection before it travels to Europe later this year.

"Richard Jackson: Ain't Painting a Pain" at the Orange County Museum of Art, 850 San Clemente Dr., Newport Beach, (949) 759-1122; www.ocma.net. 11 a.m. Through April 27. $10-$12. —ERIN DEWITT

thu/02/28

[LECTURE]

Humming a Tune

'Timeless Melodies: Can't Help Singing'

Harold Arlen is considered one of popular music's most underacknowledged songwriters. Of the 500-plus songs he penned, probably the most recognizable is "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" (which he just happened to come up with while driving down Sunset Boulevard). Other Arlen songs include "Come Rain and Come Shine," "That Old Black Magic"—there are really too many more than we have space to list. But the Bowers Museum remembers ol' Harold—and dedicates its latest Timeless Melodies lecture to him. Come join the discussion and hear some of the greatest songs of the '30s, '40s, '50s and '60s—and learn all about the unknown man behind them.

"Timeless Melodies: Can't Help Singing, Why the Great Songs are Great" at the Bowers Museum, 2002 N. Main St., Santa Ana, (714) 567-3600; www.bowers.org. 1:30 p.m. $7-$10. —ERIN DEWITT

[CONCERT]

Metal Remix

METALACHI

Some things go surprisingly well together—say, peanut butter and pickles, or heavy metal and mariachi music. Meet Metalachi, who consider themselves the world's "first and only heavy-metal mariachi band." And they're probably right. The group cover such songs as "CrazyTrain," "Run to the Hills," even "Living on a Prayer" with a glorious mariachi flourish—and it's not uncommon for some very special guests to join them for a song or two (Robert Sarzo?!). It's sleeveless denim vests and sombreros. It's electric-guitar solos and trumpets. It's weird, and we like it. Throw back a couple of shots of tequila and catch them this Thursday night as they light up the Slidebar's stage.

Metalachi at the Slidebar, 122 E. Commonwealth Ave., Fullerton, (714) 871-2233; www.slidebarfullerton.com. 8 p.m. Free. 21+. —ERIN DEWITT

Opa!

Taverna Blu proves Irvine Spectrum's dining scene is not what it used to be

BY EDWIN GOEI

With all due respect to the Cheesecake Factory and P.F. Chang's, the past few years have seen a renaissance for Irvine Spectrum's food scene. Don Bren's most accessible and populist retail shopping center hasn't experienced such a noticeable uptick in quality and unique restaurants, since, well, ever. The outdoor mall even decided to jettison its food court; there was simply no room for Sbarro's or McDonald's in a vast and varied landscape that now includes, among others, Cucina Enoteca, Tender Greens and Capital.

Things are continuing to evolve as we speak. Within the past few months, Pieology opened to mobs who routinely choke one of the Spectrum's entrances. In the near future, Umami Burger will add its fourth OC outlet here. And then there's Taverna Blu, the Orange County outlet of a San Diego-based Greek restaurant that represents a lot of what now represents dining at the Spectrum—eateries that are doing serious, uncompromising food in a center that previously played to the lowest common denominator.

With windows as its fourth wall, Taverna Blu resembles a diorama, with all the seats and polished-wood tables visible from the outside and vice versa. Just as Peruvian restaurants are required to have pictorial nods to Macchu Picchu, Taverna Blu's most prominent feature is the giant photo of Santorini, the seaside town that all Greek eateries must pay homage to. This Santorini-scape is in the form of a mural that has the city's MC Escher-esque buildings seen as though through a kaleidoscope.

If there's any dish you must order at Greek restaurants such as this, it's the saganaki. Despite being served in a Teflon pan scratched up by too many metal spoons, the square of fried cheese still comes with the requisite theatrics of a tableside flambé and shouts of "Opa!" by the servers doing the igniting. The restaurant offers two kinds: Both have the outer surface of the firm cheese seared to a savory brown crust, but opt for the honey-glazed saganaki over the original. This way, you'll have something to mop with the extra pita bread when the last morsel of cheese is as gone as the Greek economy.

It's best to spend most of your money and appetite on Taverna Blu's other small plates. There's a bowl of Greek meatballs, four orbs that yield two mouthfuls each, smothered in a bold, chunky tomato sauce tart enough to pierce through the densely packed fists of ground beef. For the Green Eggs and Gyros, a perfectly cooked, sunny-side-up egg wears a halo of pesto sauce and drapes the shaved petals of the spit-roasted gyro meat, the whole thing riding a slice of crostini you're supposed to cut up yourself if you intend to share it. The kitchen won't disturb the perfect state of the yolk by doing it for you, but it does slice the short rib crostini into quarters, the perfect size in which to eat them since the meat can get a little salty in larger amounts.

JOSUE RIVAS

BURN, BABY, BURN

Another small plate offered is fried calamari—not in the usual rings, but in meaty strips that resemble the Gorton's Fish Sticks you fed your kids last week. They will be weirdly squishy and spongy to the bite. If you can't decide whether that's a good thing, maybe ask for the tiger shrimp sauté instead—it's excellent, with the lemon-and-butter-slicked shellfish cooked to just wiggly and surrounded by a small dome of remarkably flavorful rice.

So far, I've not had much luck with the full-sized entrées. The short rib ragout was bland and almost watered-down, tangled with overcooked-to-bloated fettucine. A lamb shank plate was fine, but kind of boring; a stuffed eggplant dish was so messily presented I didn't know what it was supposed to be at first. I would also avoid the sampler platters, especially the vegetarian one. It's a lot of food to be sure, but the fries are limp and soggy, and the falafels were lukewarm and denser than Japanese korokke. The rest of the platter features decent spanakopita turned to egg rolls, tangy dolmas and an array of tiny plastic thimbles filled with a few tablespoons of appetizer dips. Some of the dips, such as the hummus and the tarama, a wondrously savory Pepto-pink paste made from caviar, are better ordered separately and deserving of all the attention you'll pay to them.

Then again, there's this layered dessert called Heaven, with amaretto-flavored mascarpone, that marks the first time a restaurant has used that word to describe a dish without actually overselling it. *Opa!*

TAVERNA BLU

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HOLE IN THE WALL
» GUSTAVO ARELLANO

Egg Foo Young At Heart

FU WING LOW
16545 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley, (714) 839-4481.

"I'll have what I always get," said the middle-aged man upon entering Fu Wing Low, sounding as satisfied as Mike Trout flying across the outfield to make a catch by the tip of his glove. "The veggie moo shu. I don't need anything else, *ever*."

The lunch rush had just ended; no other customer was in the Fountain Valley restaurant. The owner, a man in his 60s, talked to the customer for a good 20 minutes—it was obvious they had carried on conversations like this for years. Even the talk was old-school: The owner complained about how bad Chinese restaurants ruin it for the good owners such as her; the customer (who either is or was involved in the health-inspector game) admitted that sometimes the best food is at holes in the wall such as this one, holes in the wall that polite society will never visit because of its puritanical palate. "I once went to a Nicaraguan place filled with rats—but man, was it great!" he told the owner. "Thank God you're not only great, but one of the cleanest restaurants I ever saw."

And hole in the wall Fu Wing Low is. It features probably the starkest storefront in Orange County: vertical wooden slats where the windows should be, its solitary, smoked-glass door looking out toward the parking lot of a shopping plaza. At night, with the tired marquee above, a single bar of fluorescent lights below and two lantern-esque lights on each side of the door, this exterior screams more Chinatown dive bar than Chinese-American standard. And the inside probably hasn't changed since the Ford administration, with its large booths and framed flowers looming over the tables. But an entire generation of Fountain Valley-ites has sworn by its voluminous menu—it's been around since the days that Little Saigon existed only in Garden Grove's section of Brookhurst Street. This is a house of lunch specials and massive family dinners, of five egg foo youngs and rumaki, that tiki-age appetizer of liver chunks wrapped with bacon that screams for a mai tai (only beer and wine here, alas). These types of restaurants are relics, beloved places that creep into the Southern Californian mind whenever we crave pepper beef.

But change is coming to Fu Wing Low. The owner told his veggie moo shu-loving customer he's going to sell the restaurant to family members. The menu will probably remain, but the name might change. Will new ownership veer the place from its Americanized Cantonese and Szechuan classics? Only time with tell—in the meanwhile, dip those overfried egg rolls in the hot mustard one more wonderful time.

GARELLANO@OCWEEKLY.COM

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The Best Clam Chowder In Long Beach

Raquel Jubran of the Attic

ON THE LINE
» ANNE MARIE PANORINGAN

We make no assumptions when meeting a chef—although we were surprised to learn that the chef who worked at Lasher's (the establishment before the Attic) was the same person we'd be interviewing. Per Raquel Jubran, "I get to run with the menu, so I have a lot more creativity."

Earliest food memory:
Poi and barbecue fish. I spent three years of my childhood at Bellows Air Force Station [in Waimanalo, Hawaii], and there were luaus almost every weekend.
Favorite meal growing up:
Filipino-style chicken adobo.
Most undervalued ingredient:
A coriander seed is the seed of cilantro. It has such a different character from the cilantro. It just tones stuff down. I use it in a couple of my brine items, as well as in a toasted-coriander vinaigrette.
What do you recommend for first-timers to the Attic?
Pot pie, meatloaf, fried chicken and barbecue ribs for dinner. Boxty Benedict and southern scramble for breakfast.
One food you can't live without:
Rice. It's so versatile, and that's what we had as a kid with almost every meal. For some reason, you can get full, but you don't feel so weighted down. In my rice-maker, I do half white/half red.
Best culinary tip for the home cook?
Unless you are baking, recipes are just a guide. Follow your heart, and make your own version.
Weirdest thing you've ever eaten:
Fried grasshopper, or chapulín. I used to work for the Too Hot Tamales [a.k.a. chefs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger]. . . . Someone brought it in and asked if I would like some. I don't really turn anything down, and I don't like to be rude, so I tried it. I mean, it was fried. It was kind of a turning point between me and all Mexican food. It brought me a little closer.
Favorite places to eat (besides your own):
The Sky Room, Mesa Grill, Uva Bar.
Weirdest customer request:
Baby food and pasta. I think the lady could not process hard foods. She would come [to Lasher's] four, maybe five times a year. . . . We had to cook her pasta down to the point it was practically overboiled. She was so happy we would do that for her.
We read something about award-winning clam chowder.
It won three years at the Long Beach Chowder Cook-Off. It's really good! It's a New England-style clam chowder. There's nothing really secretive about it; you just take the time to do it. It's all about the roux and your ingredients. I've been to places where it's too thin, or there's way too much bacon, or it's too thick. Ours has lots of Yukon potatoes, wood-smoked bacon and celery. It's about the timing of when you put your ingredients in. I also like seasoning all throughout the cooking process.
Is there a dish you'd like to learn how to make?
Pastillas, but I don't know if I have the patience.
When you're not in the kitchen cooking, what are you doing?
Spending time with my baby girl and husband.
Where did you grow up?
My father was in the United States Air Force, so we traveled and moved a lot. I spent most of the time here in the San Fernando Valley after he retired. I was in the military, too, so I traveled a lot.
Hardest lesson you've learned:
You don't always get to be with the people you love most.
What were you up to five years ago?
Traveling around the world to surf and visiting family abroad.
Do you have any skills that are non-food-related?
Gardening. I can write with both hands. Tarot cards. I speak two other languages. Sewing quilts and dresses.
Did you teach yourself to be ambidextrous?
I knew right away when I was a kid that I could use both hands. At the Border Grill, they did some kind of managerial test. They asked us to write with our left hand. My counterpart next to me was saying, "It looks just as good as [with] your right hand!"

THE ATTIC
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A Tasty Cleanse

Date nut smoothie from Nékter Juice Bar

EatThisNow

» LP HASTINGS

Whenever someone says, "I'm going on a cleanse!" I think starvation and lawn juices. It reeks of misery and wheat grass so freaking fresh it makes your butt pucker. Of course, you feel great afterward, right about the time your body begins to eat itself and you see little fairies waving to you from the garden.

But Nékter, a local juice-bar chain with stores all over Orange County, makes its smoothies with all the good reasons for cleansing but without such intense conditions—and with better flavors. Oh, it sells wheatgrass and some juices so vibrantly green that your processed-foods-riddled body might go into shock at the first sip. But it also sells some phenomenal choices that even the worst fast-food junkie would slurp up like so much Mountain Dew. Take the date nut smoothie: raw vanilla bean, cashew-nut milk, dates, banana and nutmeg blended with ice into a toasty, cream-colored swirl with specks of golden brown. The rich texture is accented with chewy little bursts of date; after a while, they settle on the bottom of the drink as though they were boba.

After drinking it, your stomach doesn't hurt, and you won't find an extra layer on your belly the next day. If you'd like a milder version of the beverage, pour it over ice. If you'd still rather drink lemon-cayenne water all day, then Nékter has that, too. More dates for the rest of us!

SLURP UP!

Find your nearest Nékter at www.nekterjuicebar.com.

LP HASTINGS

DrinkoftheWeek

» DAVE LIEBERMAN

Aztec Revolver at the Surfin' Cowboy

I'm not sure what to make of the Surfin' Cowboy, which replaced Coconuts in Capistrano Beach. On the one hand, it has a kind of schizophrenic theme (cowboys who surf?); it's still shaking off the Affliction-shirted, vodka-Red Bull-drinking, UFC wannabes who infested the location's previous iteration, a notorious dive bar. (Incidentally, if you see the drunk dipshit who followed me out to my car and shoved me, ask him how his jaw's doing.)

On the other hand—on the much-better hand—the drink menu has gotten a serious upgrade. There's good tequila (skip the Casa Dragones, ludicrously overpriced at $50 per shot) and cocktails that were actually researched and don't rely on artificially flavored vodka. There's freshly squeezed citrus juice and simple syrup, not neon-green, bottled sour mix; there's a full complement of amari and a lot of whiskey. It's all a very, very good thing in a place that has been deprived of a good cocktail for a long time.

VAQUERO UP

DAVE LIEBERMAN

THE DRINK

Mezcal is a relative newcomer to most palates in California, though as the quality of the mezcal available here improves, more bartenders are exploring it as more than a frat-boy trick ("Eat the worm, bruh!"). The Surfin' Cowboy's signature mezcal drink, the Aztec Revolver, is a slow one. You want to sip it, letting the ice dilute the liquor just a little bit. The drink combines Delirio mezcal jóven with amaro Averna and orange bitters, plus some Zaya 12-year-old rum for a little sugar-cane funk.

Mezcal and bitters is one of those magic combinations, such as gin and vermouth, rum and lime, or whiskey and absinthe—it just works. That it's found in such an unlikely place is even better.

THE SURFIN' COWBOY

34235 Doheny Park Rd., Capistrano Beach, (949) 272-5957.

BLAKE'S LOT-A-BURGER
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Count Your Blessings

There's too much book in *Bless Me, Ultima*

BY ERNEST HARDY

"Why is there evil in the world?" That question and its corollaries—Where does evil come from? Why can so many create and commit it with apparent immunity?—are at the core of the film *Bless Me, Ultima*, whose 7-year-old hero, Antonio, wrestles with riddles that have likely stumped humans since we first stood upright.

Adapted for the screen and directed by Carl Franklin (*One False Move*, *Devil In a Blue Dress*, *One True Thing*, *Out of Time*), the movie retains the huge ambitions of Rudolfo Anaya's classic novel, a staple of Chicano Studies programs and multicultural reading lists since its publication in 1972. Both book and film celebrate spiritual practices that predate *los conquistadors* and Christianity, illuminating the ways that assimilation eroded cultural traditions while presenting the Latino community as a dynamic thread long woven into the American fabric, one representative of a people sharing the same dreams, struggles and patriotism as anyone else.

The film offers some wonderful grace notes and a magnificent anchor in Míriam Colón, who plays Ultima, also called La Grande, a *curandera* who works with herbs and communes with nature and the spirit world. Colón's performance and beautifully weathered visage convey the wisdom and fearlessness of one who has trafficked with and learned to respect forces beyond most human comprehension.

But *Bless Me* ultimately—and ironically—pulls up short because of its fealty to its source material. It attempts to shoehorn in all that the novel covers, which would take a miniseries to do it justice.

The film opens in the summer of 1944, with the aged but formidable Ultima arriving in a small New Mexico town to live out her final days with the Marez clan, whose matriarch is from the Luna family. (The names Marez and Luna, which translate to "sea" and "moon," are significant.) The Marezes include three sons who are away at war, two daughters and, finally, Antonio (Luke Ganalon), the youngest child and the one on whom the mother has pegged her dreams of having raised a priest. Almost immediately, Ultima is summoned by the Lunas to remove a fatal curse that has been put on one of the men in the family. Gathering her herbs and insisting Antonio come with her, Ultima sets off, helping to set in motion a series of events that will claim lives, reconfigure families and community, and have a profound, lifelong effect on Antonio, who narrates the tale from the vantage of adulthood.

Franklin's film is more than serviceable, but he's hamstrung by his fidelity to the book, cramming in all the novel's concerns, including familial tensions when the brothers return from war with plans that diverge from their father's; the malevolence of the town's richest citizen; and the juxtaposition of Ultima's spiritual practice with the dogma of the Catholic church, especially as demonstrated by the cruelty of the local priest toward a prematurely world-weary young atheist. Too many characters and subplots are flimsily sketched, with often-thudding dialogue employed to do the work of character development. (Much of that talk comes off as New Age speak.) The result is a dilution of the tearjerker impact to which Franklin seems to aspire.

That problematic reverence undermines the visual style, as well. Crisply shot, *Bless Me* has an antiseptic beauty that works wonderfully in spots (Ultima, clad all in black, juxtaposed against a pristine blue sky and sweeping green field), but that often strips the tale of its grit and texture, even in moments of violence or dark emotions. It often moves and feels like a more polished take on the live-action Disney movies that used to play on Sunday-night TV.

Franklin seems to be after the ways we gloss the past through nostalgia. At the same time, he is also trying to get at the ways in which the horrors of childhood can take on operatic intensity both at the time and in memory—hence the tale's rich, powerful villain does everything but twirl his mustache to convey his foulness. But the two tacks never really sync up, and neither quite serves the tale.

Still, there are moments in *Bless Me* that are poetic, underscoring Franklin's talents but also hinting at what the film might have been with more judicial shaping. The lead and supporting actors are largely fine, but some of the film's most potent scenes are those hinged simply on extras.

Early in the movie, the camera slowly travels the length of a house and its yard, where women are hanging laundry or tending a baby. Without a word being said, and with no heavy-handed clues, we immediately know this is a house of ill repute, and the women are working girls. The revelation is conveyed in mood and body language. Later, when Antonio eats lunch on his first day at school, he's laughed out of class for unpacking a burrito and a small canister of beans. He flees outside to find a small group of boys slumped quietly against a wall, eating their similarly uncool meals. Volumes are said about class, assimilation, and the ways the assimilated sometimes shame and scar those who haven't shorn themselves of ethnic or racial signifiers. There is pungency in this shorthand, in these sketches that are richly evocative without saying too much or providing too little. You can't help but wish the movie had more of it.

BLESS ME, ULTIMA
was written and directed by Carl Franklin, based on the novel by Rudolfo Anaya; and stars Míriam Colón, Luke Ganalon, Benito Martínez and Dolores Heredia. Rated PG-13.

opening

BLESS ME, ULTIMA See "Count Your Blessings," Page 25.

ongoing

AMOUR There are two things that are certain in life. One is that death will come for every one of us, in this case for Georges and Anne, an elderly couple. The other is that every film Michael Haneke makes will have a fair shot at the Cannes Palme d'Or. *Amour*, Haneke's much-garlanded latest, is set almost entirely within a well-appointed Paris apartment, amid the cathedral hush that is the director's preferred working condition. Anne is played by 85-year-old Emmanuelle Riva (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*), and Georges by 81-year-old Jean-Louis Trintignant (*My Night at Maud's*, *The Conformist*). Georges ministers to his diminishing wife through her slow decline, his fierce will for her to live pitted against her increasing will to die. Haneke elides the moments of crisis, focusing instead on details of daily caretaking, the process by which a home slowly becomes a hospice. Trintignant is at his most touching as a man vainly trying to decipher his wife's blurred speech so as not to let go of the thread of their lifelong rapport. As ever, Haneke sheds in a style that is reserved and restrained—in a word, cold. In applying an unflinching style to an inevitable process, *Amour* has a certain perfection to it, but what Haneke expresses thereby is so meager as to make it a single-minded, barren perfection. Haneke remains infallible—but so what? A movie in which incident is as spare as it is in *Amour* can certainly be great; a movie in which ideas and feelings are so sparse cannot. **(PG-13)** Nick Pinkerton. *Countywide.*

ARGO Set amid the 1979-1980 Iran hostage crisis, *Argo*, Ben Affleck's third directorial effort, is a "gritty" historical drama overwhelmed by its love of Hollywood as an inventor of imaginary narratives with real consequences, a great generator of American bedtime stories whose magic works on suburban kids and foreign enemies alike. After an Iranian Revolution for Dummies Prologue, the movie proper begins with the November 4, 1979, attack on the U.S. embassy in Tehran. While 52 Americans are held hostage, six embassy workers manage to escape, ultimately hiding out at the home of Canadian ambassador Ken Taylor (Victor Garber). Determined to smuggle the houseguests out of Iran by disguising them as a film crew on a location shoot, CIA exfiltration expert Tony Mendez (Affleck) enlists the help of John Chambers (John Goodman), a movie makeup artist, and Lester Siegel (Alan Arkin), an old-school producer. Chambers pulls off the lifetime-achievement circuit to give the "production" credibility. (In real life, Chambers won an Oscar for *Planet of the Apes*; Siegel is a composite). Between hokey wisecracks ribbing industry idiocy, the trio seizes on a dusty script for a *Star Wars* rip off called *Argo*. The great movies of the period *Argo* depicts, even period pieces, were about the American experience in the moment they were made. *Argo* doesn't reflect who we are now so much as it argues for what Hollywood can be. It's an embodiment of the kind of glibly adult film that really shouldn't be an endangered species, and a love letter from Affleck to the industry that made him, shunned him, and loves nothing more than to be loved. **(R)** Karina Longworth. *Countywide.*

BEAUTIFUL CREATURES Yet another cavalierly abstinent teen hero sulks through the swamps of *Beautiful Creatures*, a shot of pop-goth hogwash so overheated that during its run theater owners could set aside a couple aisles and cultivate Louisiana passionflower. Here witch Lena (Alice Englert) is urged by her family to spurn the love of a non-magical boy with Ethan (Alden Ehrenreich) in order to protect him from the usual forces of darkness. The new wrinkle: she is staring down her imminent 16th birthday, which in the daft mythology worked out by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl, whose books all this is based on, is the time of "claiming" when a female "caster" like herself discovers whether the forces of the universe have willed her to serve "light" or "dark." (Even in an abstinence fantasy, that's surprisingly conservative—that women possessed of extraordinary gifts have a 50/50 shot of being factory-set for evil.) Primness aside, the movie is terrific fun. Savor the candied gloom. The story is overstuffed with curses, dream visions, spell-chanting friends, voodoo nonsense, Confederate ghosts, religious crazies, secret societies, extended witch family, and testaments to the power of reading. A Southern sheriff runs his cruiser off the road, as all in movies must; the third act turns on a library research project. Beginning months, which is unusual in movies with police car crashes. Director Richard LaGravenese, who also adapted the novel, lavishes the material with greater wit than its demographic demands, and the central love story feels warm-blooded—even the air prickles between the leads. **(PG-13)** Alan Scherstuhl. *Countywide.*

DJANGO UNCHAINED After the ebullient Holocaust fantasy *Inglourious Basterds*, Quentin Tarantino takes his whole blood-spattered historical tent show on the road, this time putting down stakes in antebellum Mississippi. Jamie Foxx stars as the captured runaway slave of the title, given his freedom by an unlikely savior: a German-American bounty hunter (Basterds Oscar-winner Christoph Waltz) who trains Django to become his partner. Together, they make their way toward a sprawling Mississippi plantation known as Candyland, where Django's estranged bride, Broomhilda (Kerry Washington), lies in wait, under the thumb of a foppish master (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his septuagenarian house slave (the astonishing Samuel L. Jackson). Waltz makes these scenes, though Tarantino's true reference point is a century of Hollywood cinema's failure to engage with the ugly realities of the "peculiar institution," from Gone With the Wind to Spielberg's Lincoln. Some high-minded critics and cultural arbiters still can't bring themselves to take Tarantino seriously as an intellectual, but like all of the best pop art, *Django Unchained* is both seriously entertaining and seriously thoughtful, rattling the cage of race in America on-screen and off. **(R)** Scott Foundas. *Countywide.*

HANSEL & GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS Steven Spielberg and his jaunty little apologue about the 16th President of the United States aside, it's no longer enough in movies for an historical figure or literary character to do simple stuff like abolish slavery or find a man of intelligence and character. Abraham Lincoln is reduced to slaying vampires. Elizabeth Bennet is stuck fighting off zombies. And Hansel and Gretel can't just kill off one cannibalistic witch and call it a day. In *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters*, they've grown up to become bounty hunters who must roam the land, kicking gnarly witch butt. Actually, according to this assertively revisionist reading of the Brothers Grimm, young Hansel and Gretel were led into the woods by their parents for a very good reason, having to do with the naked ambition of a very bad witch, Muriel (Famke Janssen). As it turns out, the grown versions of Hansel and Gretel, now celebrity witch hunters—they're played by Gemma Arterton and Jeremy Renner—have been brought to a small village to find the crone who's been snatching the local children, and damned if it isn't Muriel herself, accompanied by a whole coven of evildoing uglies in makeup left over from *The Devil's Rain*. There's actually no pleasure at all to be had in this humorless *Hansel & Gretel*, which was directed by Tommy Wirkola, whose previous credits include the 2009 Nazi-zombie horror comedy *Dead Snow*. But there is a truly intriguing mystery here: What on Earth are Renner and Arterton doing in this godforsaken thing? **(R)** Stephanie Zacharek. *Countywide.*

IDENTITY THIEF Here's a breakthrough, of a sort: The funniest scenes in *Identity Thief* are of Melissa McCarthy and Jason Bateman beating the hell out of each other. McCarthy—playing a multinamed serial liar and credit-card fraud artist we'll call Diana—clocks Jason Bateman with a vicious neck punch. Bateman—as yet another sane fellow whose life is infested with idiot-driving crazies—clocks, tackles, and even brains her with the stolen bric-a-brac that clutters Diane's home. I'm not going to argue that this man hitting this woman for laughs is a progressive triumph. But it is at least a victory for whatever is the opposite of sexism. McCarthy gets bashed about like a Stooge, and she bashes back with riotous abandon. Sadly, the rest of the movie is a shambles. So, let it be said, this one time only: Here is a comedy that really could use more inter-gender violence. (I'll leave it to you to parse the sexual politics of McCarthy's result after Bateman beans her with a knicknack: "You throw like a fuckin' girl!") The rest of the film, they're solo acts, each doing what audiences expect: She's a mess and exhibits an unsocialized horniness; he regards her with dismay and disgust. Yes, disgust. There's no way around it: The producers of *Identity Thief* seem to find McCarthy's real-world body loathsome. Her big comic sex scene is ruined by director Seth Gordon's refusal to shoot her below the chin, and her Diana is later freighted with a sad-clown back story and given a princess makeover—perhaps, perhaps, for having roughhoused like the boys in the first reel. **(R)** Alan Scherstuhl. *Countywide.*

LIFE OF PI A stacked-deck theological inquiry filtered through a spectacular *Titanic*-by-way-of-*Slumdog Millionaire* narrative, *Life of Pi* manages occasional spiritual wonder through its 3-D visuals but otherwise sinks like a stone. It's no shock that Ang Lee brings to his high seas adventure graceful and refined aesthetics devoid of any unique signature or pressing emotion, as the director has proved himself a skillful craftsman without an imprimatur to call his own. Here, that anonymity results in slavish, proficient devotion to his source material, Yann Martel's 2001 novel. The story concerns the upbringing of Pi (newcomer Suraj Sharma) in India, his unbelievable experiences surviving a shipwreck aboard a life raft also occupied by a Bengal tiger, and his post-rescue efforts to convince Japanese officials that his tale is true—a three-part structure that's framed by the adult Pi (Irrfan Khan), recounting his tale to a nameless Writer (Rafe Spall). A struggling Caucasian American novelist who has been told that Pi's saga will convince him of God's existence, the Writer—who looks like he just came from a Banana Republic modeling shoot—is a colonialist appropriator of Pi's story, which he plans to turn into his own novel. Lee ignores such thorny sociopolitical dynamics, opting instead to couch this framework as further proof of the divine magic of storytelling. Lee stages the freighter's demise with a thrilling immediacy, taking full advantage of 3-D, and culminates with a shot of an underwater Pi gazing at the vessel as it descends to the bottom, its lights twinkling like flickering eyes. Still, the story's relentless articulation of its thematic aims proves a buzz kill, and the film spoon-feeds rather than enlightens. **(PG-13)** Nick Schager. *Countywide.*

LINCOLN Much has already been written about Daniel Day-Lewis' interpretation of the 16th U.S. president in Spielberg's *Lincoln*, and specifically about the reedy Midwestern tenor he adopts, derived from the often-mocking historical documentation of Lincoln's contemporaries. A theater contrast with the stentorian elocution Lewis actors tend to adopt for the great emancipator, it's the most superficial and immediately apparent facet of this somehow almost 4-D character made flesh by Day-Lewis: a vivid evocation of a man no living person ever knew, and what amounts to the best guess at arguably the best actor of his generation. So that's one of the challenges Spielberg confronts: squaring the George white marble of the Lincoln Memorial with the flesh-and-blood reality we can never really know—evoking the man without diminishing the legend. The director's other challenges include relating the complications and subtleties of political maneuvering, and the inherent suckiness of 19th-century Spielberg solves that by lensing the portrait through a single event: the fight to pass the 13th Amendment through the house of representatives. The film is studied and often somber, but it is also hugely entertaining, a bitchingly fun story of political gamesmanship, influence trading, parliamentary chess, and outright bribery. This Lincoln is quietly ironic, an indulgent storyteller, a hugely charismatic figure. A politician's tune charmingly persuasive and iron-fisted. A melancholic who suffers deeply, forced to barricade his grief behind a facade of aloofness and disarming humor. A father who sprawls on the floor with his young son, and a husband whose wife's madness is no match for his affection. A politician's just crazy good. **(PG-13)** Chris Packham. *Countywide.*

SIDE EFFECTS If *Side Effects*, an immensely pleasurable thriller centering around psychotropic drugs, really is Steven Soderbergh's final film, as the director claims it will be, then he has peaked in the Valley of the Dolls. Scripted by Scott Z. Burns, who also wrote the screenplay for Soderbergh's *Contagion* (2011), *Side Effects* features, at least at first, the earlier movie's icy fury over the corruption of the medical profession. Yet when this initially pointed critique of our quick-fix, highly medicated era becomes a twisty genre exercise—filled with double-crosses, and blouses ripped open—it doesn't lessen the movie's punch. *Side Effects* begins with the scene of a crime: blood on the hardwood floors of a modest Manhattan apartment. The film then cuts to three months earlier as 28-year-old Emily Taylor (Rooney Mara) applies lipstick the same sanguine hue as the gore in the prologue. Skeletal, morose, and vacant-eyed, she is prettying herself up for a prison visit with her husband, Martin (Channing Tatum), who is nearing the end of a four-year sentence for insider trading. Yet Martin's release seems to send Emily into deeper despair. A suicide attempt lands her in the care of overextended shrink Dr. Jonathan Banks (Jude Law). Emily's depression seems to be lifting under a new drug though soon one of its unintended effects—episodes of "acute parasomnia"—leads her to commit a very gruesome sleep crime. Scenes between Catherine Zeta-Jones, perfect as a steely rival shrink, and Law, even better than he was as the fear-mongering blogger in *Contagion*, reminds us what we'll be missing if Soderbergh never makes another film: someone to diagnose our national malaise as coolly and seductively as he has. **(R)** Melissa Anderson. *Countywide.*

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Material Magic

Bowers Museum spotlights the best of Cosprop, British-made movie dressers

BY STACY DAVIES

One of the areas that never gets much attention in a film (at least not by the audience) is costume design—unless someone's dressed like a giant clam, of course, and we haven't seen that since Rex Reed in *Myra Breckinridge*. Everyone also knows that the presentation of Best Costume Design is one of those Oscar telecast "outs" that viewers use to tend to other business, and it's for that reason the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences always tries to get a big name to hand out the award, hoping you'll stay in your seat. (Last year, sexy gals Cameron Diaz and Jennifer Lopez shared the presenting honor, but it might as well have been a botoxed Sylvester Stallone, since all eyes were still glued to Angelina Jolie and that *leg*.)

JACK SPARROW NOT INCLUDED

Costume is essential in film, of course, and not just the overtly frilly kind. Anything a character wears is costume and not only reveals character, but also makes that person's presence in the story believable. When Anne Bancroft wears a leopard coat (and bra) in *The Graduate*, it's a costume that tells us she's on the hunt. When John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson wear suits to murder people in *Pulp Fiction*, their costumes tell us their characters take pride in their work. The most noticeable costumes, however, come from the much-dreaded/much-loved period film, and few popcorn munchers are aware of the intricacies that genre/era-specific materials require.

Enter Cosprop, the famous London costumers who are the industry go-to people when one needs Marie Antoinette frocks or Great War officer duds, whose meteoric rise to fame began in 1986 with an Oscar win for the Merchant Ivory production *A Room With a View*. Since then, the costume house has garnered 24 additional nominations, with its most recent win for the 2008 film *The Duchess*, starring Keira Knightly. Still, the praise barely trickles in from the public, and in hopes of shedding light on the artistry of design and the skill of hand-stitching, the Bowers Museum presents "CUT! Costume and the Cinema." Featuring ensembles from more than 30 actors in 27 films, this exhibit might sound as if it would only appeal to quilting grannies or fabulous fellows who love feathers, but one gander at these astonishing creations can probably win over even the most deeply rutted T-shirt-and-flip-flop-wearing fop.

There's a reason it's called "building" a costume, you see—these rigs can be as complex as skyscrapers.

There's also a rather delightful, probably unintended result of seeing dress-forms (mannequins, to you and me) adorned with famous people's clothing: Every once in a while, it feels as if that famous person is actually *there*, in the clothes, and more than a few times I easily pictured Colin Farrell, Emma Thompson and Johnny Depp standing before me.

Action-movie fans will no doubt get a kick from an up-close-and-personal visit with Captain Jack Sparrow's pirate ensemble; take in the embroidered designs on the coat that could not be seen in the movie, as well as his tricorn hat, sword and tasseled scarf. Likewise, Jude Law and Robert Downey Jr. appear in the form of a very smart black-and-white corduroy frock coat (Sherlock) and brown herringbone, wool, three-piece suit (Holmes). Heath Ledger is brought back to life in his red *Casanova* coat, with its metallic, gold embroidery over patterned silk and sequined spangles. This, along with Daniel Craig's before-and-after bomber jackets from *Defiance*, might have you questioning the wardrobe choices of the males in your life.

> Every once in a while, it feels as if that famous person is actually *there*, in the clothes, and more than a few times I easily pictured Colin Farrell, Emma Thompson and Johnny Depp standing before me.

The ladies' fashions are the most spectacular, of course, from legendary Brits Dame Maggie Smith (*Gosford Park*) and Vanessa Redgrave (*Mrs. Dalloway*) to second-tiers Julie Christie (*Hamlet*) and Nicole Kidman (*Portrait of a Lady*), with Christie's stunning Delphos gown and Kidman's intricately beaded dress exceptional standouts.

In fact, just about every mega-star is here—Minnie Driver (*Phantom of the Opera*), Kate Winslet (*Sense and Sensibility*), Angelica Huston (*Ever After*), Ralph Fiennes (*The White Countess*) and others. You'll be so immersed in feathers, lace, furs, emerald buttons, bustles, hoop skirts, corsets, hand-painted flowers, gold lamé, metallic thread and brocade that when you return to the outside world, where sneakers and sweat shirts, hoodies and baseball caps, and skinny jeans and skank skirts make up the bulk of our daily apparel, you just might think, for one moment, that buttons on your boots or cracking a rib in a corset might not be all *that* bad. After all, just as with these characters, we, too, are judged by our dress. Read: *Idiocracy*.

"CUT! COSTUME AND THE CINEMA" at the Bowers Museum, 2002 N. Main St., Santa Ana, (714) 567-3600; www.bowers.org. Open Tues.-Sun., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Through March 10. $7-$10.

TRENDZILLA
»TAYLOR HAMBY

High-Top Heyday

The 1990s were a horrible time for footwear. It's as though designers asked, "How bulky, obnoxious and tall can we make a shoe and still make a profit?" And then they stretched that question to the limit.

Last year, you couldn't go anywhere without seeing gals in chunky, Jeffrey Campbell platform boots, so it was only a matter of time before the company brought back the platform sneaker. Steve Madden, Aldo, Converse and Vans are all following suit with their collections as well. Makes you wonder what other type of Spice Girl chic is going to make a comeback: Union Jacks and Scary Spice's hair horns?

A trip to the Nordstrom shoe section will surround you with a neon rainbow of high-top sneakers with velcro straps, including the classic Nike Dunks, but also designer interpretations by Marc Jacobs, Prada and Chloe. Several of these designs include sneakers with a wedge heel—you know, for those days you just can't decide if tennis shoes or heels would look better with your dress.

Then there's the dated trend that won't die: acid wash. Every few years, that style tries to make a comeback. Usually, you'll see it with jackets and jeans, but now look shoeward. Vans is now offering its classic sneaker in pink, blue and black acid-wash-denim varieties.

Grunge and punk shoe staple Dr. Martens boots have been enjoying a resurgence with young, fashionable types, thanks to girly twists on their iconic work boots; you'll find floral prints, velvet and lace accents.

Each of these recycled shoe trends offers gals a chance to relieve their youth. Wonder how long it'll be until companies try to bring back the jelly sandal again. …

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An Unlikely Songbird

Joey Diaz gets up every morning and tweets random-ass music from his iPod

BY ALI LERMAN

NOT A *COÑO*

Joey "CoCo" Diaz isn't really the guy you'd expect to go around singing songs in public. But we'll be damned if he doesn't post them on Twitter. Every day, the hefty, foul-mouthed comic wakes up his followers with a blast of noise, whether it's Tool or 2Pac. It's the kind of ritual that proves there's more to this New Jersey native than meets the eye, even for those who've followed his career.

To really understand the mind of this Cuban-American comic, you gotta get up and listen religiously to his podcast, the aptly titled *Testicle Testaments, The Church of What's Happening Now*, for which he mixes topical humor you'd expect from a comic with raunchy tales that never fail to put his friends on blast. This week, Diaz makes his way to the City National Grove of Anaheim, along with his road dog Joe Rogan, to bring his raw style of comedy that leaves no four-letter word unturned.

OC Weekly: *Congrats on the new baby! I'm glad to see fatherhood hasn't affected your dirty language.*

Joey Diaz: Thank you. Yeah, you know me; I'm still out of my fucking mind.

You post music daily on Twitter. Can you narrow down five favorite artists who stay in your rotation?

Alice In Chains, Soundgarden, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Biggie Smalls—that's the five I'd keep around if I could. Then again, I feel bad because I play a lot of Pearl Jam. I love them so much. This morning, I had on Metallica and Pantera. I mean, who would believe I like Pantera? It's so weird how I love Elton John, but they'd throw me off Twitter if I put him on. I put the B-52's' song "Rock Lobster" on there, and they were calling me everything but "gay," "fag," you know? It's hysterical. The reason I put the music on Twitter is to let you know the state of mind I'm in. Sometimes, you get up in the morning, and you go to pee, and the first song in your mind is the one I gotta get on [Twitter].

Your podcast starts at 6 a.m., Is there a reason why you do it so early in the morning?

You ever put the news on at 6 in the morning? They save the good [news] for the last six minutes. By that time, you've already had 54 minutes of bad fucking news! I've already had 54 minutes of kids getting abducted, women getting raped, students getting shot, and now you want to tell me about the blind kid who can play the fucking drums? Now it's too fucking late; I'm about to shoot heroin! I didn't want to do that, so I do my podcast at 6 in the morning to let you know to get out there and do what the fuck you want to do. End of story.

Why don't you ever change names of the real stories you tell about people in your set?

It's like I always tell Joe Rogan: I have 1,000 stories, but I have 10,000 I can't tell. If I'm telling them, everyone is involved, and we're all laughing. You can't have the listeners feel as though they're not good enough to be part of the conversation. That's why for *The Church of What's Happening Now*, it's very important to have my friends call up to put faces to the names for the listeners. If I tell you a story, you know I can back it up.

I'm sure you get a lot of people stereotyping you as some loud, obnoxious guy, but you are actually so positive once people take the time to sit and listen.

I could call you up and say, "Oh, it's going to be a God-blessed day!" And then I'm gonna go out there and cut somebody off in traffic and say, "nigger" 50 times. Me? I'm gonna call you and say, "Ali, wash that pussy and get yours. It's gonna be a great day, and you don't know if you're gonna bump into a fucking bus or a recovering cocksucker." I could bullshit you, but I roll the other way.

JOEY DIAZ

performs with Joe Rogan at the City National Grove of Anaheim, 2200 E. Katella Ave., Anaheim (714) 712-2700; www.citynationalgroveofanaheim.com. Fri., 8 p.m. $39.50-$49.50. For more info, visit www.JoeyCocoDiaz.net or follow him on Twitter: @MadFlavor.

JUREÑOS DE SKA

Still Prime(Mates)

Los Kung Fu Monkeys swing on through the years

BY REYAN ALI

Bernardo Leos' childhood in Tijuana, Mexico, was one without cable television. The future vocalist of the Tijuana-based Los Kung Fu Monkeys would catch San Diego channels whose signals were strong enough to reach across the border. Channel 69 (today a Fox affiliate called KSWB-TV) had a habit of broadcasting B-movies, and thanks to its programming, Leos experienced a revelation at age 10.

"Suddenly, one day, I put on the TV, and *Rock & Roll High School* was on," remembers the 32-year-old, referencing the 1979 cult classic. "I started watching the movie, and I saw the Ramones, and I'm like, 'Fuck, yeah!'" The New York City punk group's scrappy tunes and leather jackets left an impression on Leos. His first record purchase was one of that band's albums.

Splicing punk angst with Mexican culture and SoCal-inspired brass is the hallmark of cult favorite Kung Fu Monkeys, making their honorable distinction as the only ska-punk band in Tijuana all the more important decades after the salad days of the genre.

In the early '90s, popular groups such as Nirvana were in their heyday, which was also critical in hooking Leos before the formation of his band. This burgeoning interest in alternative and underground music led him to a NOFX record; he scoured the album's "Thanks" section in search of more new-to-him bands.

"I wasn't the popular kid in school. I wasn't a preppy kid. I wasn't the kid listening to pop songs," Leos says. "I think this is going to sound very cliché, but I was the outcast among a lot of people, so I started hanging out with people who liked the same kind of stuff I did."

When Leos was in high school, his buddies were Tarek and Hassan Limas, brothers he had actually met in Catholic school. A mutual interest in skateboarding between the friends eventually turned into serious discussions of them playing music together. "We tried skating. We weren't very good at it, so I guess we started a band," Leos says with a laugh.

> "I'm a punk rocker. I'm going to be be 40, and I'm going to still be a punk rocker."

Launching as Monkey Kung Fu in 1997 (another band's onstage shout-out to them as "Los Kung Fu Monkeys" left them with today's moniker), the band's first tune was a cover of the Suicide Machines' "No Face." Since then, they've maintained a serious allegiance to punk, as well as ska and hardcore. Los Kung Fu Monkeys specialize in upbeat, unabashedly enthusiastic tunes that are best for lighthearted mosh pits. The group's melodic approach would have found a perfect home on SideOneDummy or Fat Wreck Records circa 1998, but just because the tides of time have pushed their brand of ska punk out of cultural vogue (even those labels rarely sign acts with their sound nowadays) doesn't mean they've stopped making it.

After establishing their cred through shows with punk bands of similar leanings and dates on the Vans Warped Tour, Los Kung Fu Monkeys have continued to tour steadily, although their recorded output has slowed. (Their last album was self-titled and released in 2006.) Though Leos is a big enthusiast of groups within metal, new wave and indie rock—namely Testament, Depeche Mode and Foster the People—he takes great pride in his seven-piece's loyalty to their original sound. "We're kind of like the only ska-punk band in [Tijuana] now and possibly one of the only five in Mexico altogether," he says.

"We didn't get in it for the trend. We got in it because we wanted to play this kind of music. [We've] always considered ourselves more of a punk band. Ska came into the mix because we were listening to bands play ska," Leos says. "I'm a punk rocker. I'm going to be be 40, and I'm going to still be a punk rocker. I'm going to enjoy listening to Frank Sinatra, but I'm going to still be a punk rocker. I don't see myself playing anything else very far away from punk rock. Maybe I'll start a hardcore band as a side project, but with Kung Fu Monkeys, we're never going to leave our line of music."

LOS KUNG FU MONKEYS perform with Mustard Plug and Defunked at the Slidebar, 122 E. Commonwealth Ave., Fullerton, (714) 871-7469; www.slidebarfullerton.com. Wed., 8 p.m. 21+. Free.

AskExene

» EXENE CERVENKA

DEAR EXENE: I am 16 years old and have been trying to start a band for three years. I'm not saying I'm gonna kill myself if I can't find a band, but it is something I have shed blood, sweat and tears over. I just wanna play real rock music, and no one else does. What would you do if you were in my shoes? I will never give up on this dream, but no one else is serious. I have put fliers up all over town—at music stores, music-supplies stores, etc. I am willing to work my fingers to the bone for this. Any advice from a legend such as yourself will be golden. Thanks.

Love, Dieter

DEAR DIETER: Sometimes, things fall miraculously into place—we meet the right person at the right moment, get pointed in a direction through accident or coincidence, you never know. Being in a band isn't a step-by-step process such as studying, learning a trade, then getting a job in a chosen field. There are a million variables. Unless it's you and an acoustic guitar, there will be obstacles, only one of which is finding the other musicians in the first place, and they all have their own dreams of what they want to do and be. It sounds as though you have pursued this through the obvious channels, with no luck so far. That doesn't mean it won't happen. Maybe other places are more suited to what you want to do? Obviously, you are younger and perhaps cannot pick up and move, but that's what a lot of musicians do. Every city has its own scene: Austin, Portland, New York, Phoenix—all have a completely different reality musically than SoCal. In 2013, an artist has to be incredibly daring and brave. And bravery is rare these days; we could use more of it. I hope you will be a voice for your generation and do what you feel you were meant to do in this life.

And that advice goes for a reader named Lisa, whose question I recently answered. I have had much conflict over the reply I gave you a few weeks ago. What I should have said to you, Lisa, was: Bravery is rare these days. You have it. YOU CAN DO ANYTHING.

Love, Exene

Exene Cervenka is a writer, visual artist and punk rock pioneer. The OC transplant is the lead singer for X, the Knitters and Original Sinners. If you want to ask the legendary vocalist for advice—on your love life, politics, your musical career—send an email to askexene@ocweekly.com.

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Sunshine Funk

Holychild embrace a free-flow of ideas over a concrete downbeat

BY KATRINA NATTRESS

Elizabeth Nistico and Louis Diller's story is not too uncommon—boy meets girl in college; girl graduates and moves from Washington, D.C., to Brooklyn; girl commutes to Washington, D.C., while boy finishes up school; girl decides to say, "Screw it" and sells all of her belongings so she can move back to Washington, D.C., to start a band. Add in a dash of basement-party soul and West African rhythms, and you have an idea of how Holychild were born.

"We spent virtually every night for a couple of months during the summer of 2011 in [Louis'] practice space in D.C. making music together," Nistico explains. At the time, they had no intention of doing anything seriously with the music after drifting apart post-graduation, but after getting sick of the arduous commute from Brooklyn to D.C., Nistico's decision to move back turned into a year-long evolution, wading through various styles and band members to create a journey through which songs such as "Diamonds On the Rebound" bloom with the hippie sunshine in Nistico's voice and Diller's deft knowledge of a head-bobbing downbeat.

A year and a half after the two began writing and jamming together, they have produced their first baby, a sturdy little EP called *Tribes*, which they're ready to share with the world. "[It] was a fairly massive production for just seven songs," Nistico says.

The tracks run the gamut of indie genres, ranging from straightforward pop to string-driven funk, even an indie rock arrangement of Miles Davis' "All Blues." "We have everything from our West African friend, Gabin, ripping it on talking drum to a local children's choir to the president of George Washington University and a huge gang of vocals on the record," Nistico explains.

The boundary stretching carried over into Nistico's and Diller's personal lives, as they moved to Los Angeles upon finishing the EP. "We decided it would be wise to relocate to a thriving creative environment such as LA to further the project," Nistico admits. "It was here in LA where Louis has reconnected with a bunch of his California friends—he's from Oakland originally—and in turn, we asked Russell Henson and Ben Rose to join us in this endeavor, complete the sound and make Holychild what it is today."

These days, the quartet make a name for themselves not just for their adventurous sound, but also for a live show that Diller describes as "[not good] unless we're all drenched in sweat by the end of it."

But it's a symbiotic relationship. "The huge artistic community here in Southern California has forced us to evaluate who we are and what Holychild are even more," Nistico says. "Since being here, we have written about 10 new songs, and they definitely embody a more complete and cohesive concept we are itching to record in full sometime soon."

"The huge artistic community here in Southern California has forced us to evaluate who we are and what Holychild are even more."

Thanks to their ambition and acclimation to SoCal, the experimental collective have been headlining Costa Mesa's Detroit Bar every Monday night this month, playing with such bands as Travelers (featuring members of Young the Giant), Steffaloo and Hotel Cinema. Aside from the simple opportunity to spread their sound into OC, Holychild are convinced their taste as curators during the residency allows them to birth something special. It's an energy that relies on a lot of different sonic flavors from the bands they choose for the sole purpose of reminding bar crowds what it's like to dance their asses off to unexpected sounds on a weeknight.

"We feel so lucky to have all the bands we have booked for these shows, since they're all actually amazing outfits we would get down to, irrespective of these shows," Diller says. "There is not one act we are not personally excited to hear live. There is some very sold and diverse music being played from start to finish at every one of these shows."

HOLYCHILD
perform at Detroit Bar, 843 W. 19th St., Costa Mesa, (949) 642-0600; www.detroitbar.com. Mon., 8:30 p.m. 21+. Free.

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ZONE PAGES

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COMING SOON!

2/22	B.B. King - SOLD OUT!	3/9	Maleni Magana presents Damage Inc.,
2/23	Iration - SOLD OUT!		Just Like Priest, Electric Funeral,
2/24	Aaron Lewis – SOLD OUT		Outt of the Cellar
2/26	Orange County Music Awards Live	3/14	Steel Panther
	Band Finals Showcase	3/15	Beto Cuevas
3/4	Musink Battle of the Bands Finals	3/16	Velbeat, Danko Jones - SOLD OUT
3/6	Detour Live presents Acropolis	3/17	The Adicts St. Patrick's Day Bash
	Records Showcase	3/19	Imagine Dragons, Atlas Genius, Nice Vega -
3/7	The Ready Set & Outasight w/ 2am Club,		SOLD OUT
	Goldhouse, Master Shorty, Kelsi Luck	3/21	Flyleaf & Drowning Pool
3/8	SC Presents	3/22	Anthrax, High on Fire, Municipal Waste, Holy Grail

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MON 2/25 — holychild + special guests

TUES 2/26 — **Live & Local**
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UPCOMING HIGHLIGHTS

THURS 2/28 — Goldroom, Viceroy, Ghost Beach

SUN 3/03 — Kishi Bashi, Shogu Tukomaru

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Blue-Collar Boys

VINNIE AND THE HOOLIGANS perform at the Gypsy Den, 125 N. Broadway Ave., Santa Ana, (714) 835-8840; www.gypsyden.com. Tues., 7 p.m. All ages. Free. For more info on the band, visit www.facebook.com/vinnieandthehooligans.

The silent seconds at the beginning of a weekly Vinnie and the Hooligans band practice feel like an eternity. One by one, they quit their side conversations and lean into a loose huddle among the shiny, emerald-green barber chairs at King's Club Barber Shop in Dana Point. The eyes of buxom pin-ups and such big-band greats as Count Basie and Glenn Miller stare down at them from posters mounted on wood-paneled walls splashed with lamp light and old-timey ambiance. Quietly, the band members lock eyes and wait. Tattooed forearms tense up, and white-knuckled fists clench around instruments. No one seems to be breathing until Vinnie Carlini snaps the tension with one strum of "To the Grave," the hardest, fastest song in the band's catalog. Sitting in a wooden chair holding an acoustic guitar in dirty white jeans, a white shirt and white Converses, he stomps his left foot and calls out the cadence.

"Eye contact!" he yells. "Ready, boys? One, two, three, four!"

Since last April, the South County band have filled the shop with noise every Tuesday after sundown, a ritual that patrons walking in the small circle of local businesses know all too well. For an hour and a half or more, this old-school, all-male sanctuary becomes a bastion of blue-collar war music; pirate-style drinking songs; and anthems about lost love, hard living and death. But when these tales are funneled through a five-piece string band, including the red-faced growl of Carlini, they inspire crowds to become light on their feet, no matter how heavy the subject matter. Songs such as "Sticks and Stones" and "Desperate Man" exist somewhere between the pastoral twang of the Lumineers and the driving cow-punk of Social Distortion. Since they've started, the hype around their sound has steadily stretched beyond the comfort of the shop walls. Last August, they even opened for the Reverend Horton Heat after being a band for all of five months. But more than fame, they're really just looking to light a fire under your ass with their tunes.

"We wanted to have songs in which we were gonna abruptly shove good music down people's throats, whether they wanted to hear it or not," says violinist/mandolin player Max Esposito.

It's only right this barbershop band would start with Carlini meeting accordion player Scott Young, who was Carlini's barber for two years before they discussed playing together. Even then, it almost didn't happen. Carlini gave him a CD of songs to learn, but it was two months before Young would listen to it. "As soon as I did, I felt so dumb because every song was a hit—it was crazy," he says. (Those songs would later become their first recorded output.) Before long, Young recruited longtime friend and standup bassist Miguel Gonzales, followed by Esposito (who works just down the road at another barber shop called Golden Crown) and his roommate, banjoist extraordinaire Mike Pham.

> "We were gonna abruptly shove good music down people's throats, whether they wanted to hear it or not."

The scrappy nature of their sound is reflective of their ability to play pretty much anywhere. When a conventional show won't do, they often set up on street corners in Laguna Beach or organize the occasional flash-mob performance at a local dive bar. Young admits that the idea of loud, tattooed, punk-rock-looking dudes bum-rushing bars in South County doesn't always go over well.

"We did one flash mob that did great," he says. "[But] we did another and got kicked out after three songs [because] the owner was so fuckin' angry."

For a band who thrive on rowdy, working-class party music from the days of old, causing a little ruckus isn't always a bad thing.

"We definitely want that energy when we play," Gonzalez says. "I don't think I could just play bluegrass or whatever. I need something that's going to get me super into it, and I want that element of danger in the crowd and onstage, like a chair could be thrown against a wall and broken at any moment."

NJACKSON@OCWEEKLY.COM

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2/22 THE ULTIMATE STONES
2/23 KENNY LOGGINS
2/26 ISRAEL VIBRATION
2/27 MARCUS FOSTER
2/28 DAN HICKS & THE HOT LICKS
3/1 DAVID LINDLEY
3/2 DADA
3/8 AMBROSIA
3/9 TOAD THE WET SPROCKET
3/10 THE GREEN
3/15 EDWIN McCAIN
3/16 POXY BOGGARDS
3/17 ORANGE COUNTY'S FUNNIEST HOUSEWIVES
3/20 BOB SCHNEIDER
3/21 JERRY GARCIA BAND
3/23 THE MAVERICKS
3/28 MIDNITE
3/29 COCO MONTOYA
3/30 JOHN WAITE
4/4 BIG HEAD TODD & THE MONSTERS
4/5 ROGER CLYNE & THE PEACEMAKERS
4/12 CARL PALMER'S ELP LEGACY
4/13 THE ENGLISH BEAT
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3/10 THE GREEN

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3/21 JERRY GARCIA BAND

3/28 MIDNITE

4/5 ROGER CLYNE

UPCOMING SHOWS
4/18 TYRONE WELLS
4/19 ERIC BURDON
4/20 WHICH ONE'S PINK?
4/26 YOUNG DUBLINERS
5/2 CALIFORNIA GUITAR TRIO
5/11 Y&T
5/16 ADLER (Original Guns N Roses drummer)
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5 TOP MOVIE SOUNDTRACKS MADE BY ROCK STARS

SOMETIMES IT TAKES THE RIGHT MUSICIAN TO TURN THE POWER OF A FILM UP TO 11

BY KELSEY BOWEN

When a film is made, part of the process is finding the right songs for the soundtrack. Sometimes, a musician contributes a single song; other times, it's an entire soundtrack. These five made-for-movie albums by handpicked musicians have been nominated for or won an Oscar, not only guiding the movie along onscreen, but also giving us great songs that hold up long after the credits roll.

5 AIMEE MANN, *MAGNOLIA* (1999)

Magnolia was a highly acclaimed work praised for its litany of superstar actors who drove this dramatic patchwork of interrelated stories set in the San Fernando Valley. Popular '90s folk singer Aimee Mann was selected to write the soundtrack that gave this movie its depth. From songs such as "Wise Up," sung by every member of the cast at one point, to the melancholy pop jam "Save Me" (nominated for Best Song in 2000), every inch of this soundtrack manages to leave its mark on the mood of the film.

4 BADLY DRAWN BOY, *ABOUT A BOY* (2002)

The soundtrack to the Hugh Grant rom-com *About a Boy*, based on the novel by Nick Hornby, was entrusted to English singer/songwriter Damon Gough, a.k.a. Badly Drawn Boy. Gough is known for his extreme sounds, often employing several instruments at once, all by himself. This was a challenge for him, but he made one hell of a soundtrack; each song was prepared for each scene in the movie, yet the flow of the soundtrack doesn't feel choppy. Weepy songs such as "A Minor Accident" chop straight through your heart with Gough's Bard-like folk brimming with honest emotion (and loads of harmonica playing).

3 EDDIE VEDDER, *INTO THE WILD* (2007)

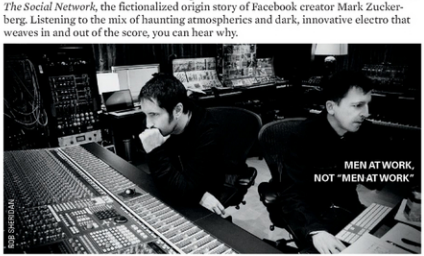
What happens when Sean Penn asks Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder to work on a movie soundtrack for him? You get something as untamed as the music for *Into the Wild*, based on the Alaskan travels of California-born Christopher McCandless, who wanted to live life like Henry David Thoreau. Vedder later won a Golden Globe for the song "Guarantee," and the soundtrack debuted at No. 11 on the Billboard 200 chart.

2 M. WARD, *THE GO-GETTERS* (2007)

Rarely does the music of a film contribute to the start of a band. But in the case of M. Ward and Zooey Deschanel's folk duo She & Him, they can trace their origin to the indie film *The Go-Getters*. Deschanel, one of the movie's stars, sang backup vocals for a few of the songs on the soundtrack, and after having met Ward, they started working together. Ward landed the job of writing the film's soundtrack after director Martin Hynes saw him open for Bright Eyes, which ought to give hope to attention-starved opening acts everywhere.

1 TRENT REZNOR AND ATTICUS ROSS, *THE SOCIAL NETWORK* (2011)

Known for his industrial sound with the band Nine Inch Nails, Trent Reznor worked with David Fincher on a few dark, crime-ridden flicks, including *Se7en* and the American version of *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*. But in 2012, Reznor and partner Atticus Ross won an Oscar for Best Original Score for their work on the soundtrack for *The Social Network*, the fictionalized origin story of Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg. Listening to the mix of haunting atmospherics and dark, innovative electro that weaves in and out of the score, you can hear why.



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savage love»

»DAN SAVAGE

A PROGRAMMING NOTE: I hosted a live taping of the *Savage Lovecast* in Seattle on Valentine's Day, and it went great—thanks to all who came (especially to the five boys who left with butt plugs in their butts)—but I made the mistake of having a drink or five afterward, and I'm so fucking hungover right now that I shouldn't be sitting upright, much less giving advice. But deadlines are deadlines. So here we go . . .

I'm a 31-year-old genderqueer in Brooklyn with a large family on Long Island. My only sister got engaged 48 hours ago, and she's moving fast on planning the wedding. I have two questions.

No. 1: I texted my sister the only date I wasn't available in the next two years, which is Columbus Day weekend 2013. I have my 10-year college reunion, which I've been organizing. My sister texted me back they picked this Columbus Day weekend for the wedding, even though they have no idea if the places they want will be booked up. It quickly came out they didn't check with anyone about potential conflicts. She wants me to be the maid of honor, and I'm not sure what to do. She's really upset with me. Columbus Day weekend is of no significance to them (it's not the anniversary of the date they met or anything), and I can't reschedule the reunion.

No. 2: I was born female but do not identify that way. I'm genderqueer and do not look like a girl. I have not worn a dress in 10 years and feel like I'm in drag in one. In the past, my sister said she would consider putting me in a pantsuit-ish kind of thing at her wedding, which would be great, but I am worried that now I'm rocking the boat too much with this Columbus Day thing, and I don't know if I should just leave it alone. My girlfriend, who is very pretty and feminine, said if I had to wear a dress, she'd go in a suit and bow tie.

Dan, help! If, for some reason, my sister can't get her weekend, it will be because they're rushing and everything is booked, but I have already caused trouble! Is it worth it to fight for the pantsuit thing, or should I just leave it alone and do what she wants?

Thank You So Much

No. 1: If your sister didn't check with anyone—not members of her immediate family, not members of her bridal party—about potential conflicts, then she should've anticipated that some of the folks wouldn't be able to attend. Folks who aren't getting married have lives and commitments of their own, which means they can have conflicts, and your sister could've worked around those conflicts if she had cared to ask about them. But she didn't care to ask because she seems to be one of those brides-to-be who thinks an engagement ring on her finger puts her as the center of the universe. Here's hoping your sister can't get the venue she wants and has to reschedule. If that doesn't happen, tell her you'll be with her in spirit and send a gift.

No. 2: The fact that your sister has been engaged for 48 hours and is already furious with her maid-of-honor-elect is a bad sign. You'll be doing yourself, both families, and your sister a service if you stand up to her now. A little pushback now will either prevent your sister from going Bridezilla or get you dropped from the wedding party. You can't lose. So tell your sister now that you're delighted to be her maid of honor, if scheduling allows, and that you look forward to shopping for a pantsuit that matches her dress and the dresses of her bridal party. If she tells you that you have to wear a dress to be her maid of honor, then it's clear the dress is more important to your sister than the person wearing it, and you should tell her to find someone else to model it at her wedding.

A gay friend of mine is getting married in Seattle, and we're hoping to throw him a most excellent bachelor party. However, as a straight dude, I'm fairly clueless about gay strip clubs in the Seattle area. Can you please recommend one or two good ones?

Straight Best Man

There *are* no gay strip clubs in Seattle, I'm sorry to say. You can blame the Washington State Liquor Control Board for that sad fact. Adults in Seattle can look at naked people, *or* they can have a drink, but they can't have a drink *while* looking at naked people. Though there's enough demand for naked ladies in Seattle to make non-booze-servin' straight strip clubs economically viable, there isn't enough demand for naked boys to make gay strip clubs economically viable. (And people have tried.) There is, however, a great gay strip club in Portland, Oregon, called Silverado. If gay strippers are a must, plan a road trip as well as a bachelor party.

My boyfriend and I are talking about getting married, and I am incredibly excited about marrying this awesome dude. My problem is that my ideal engagement ring is something that looks nice but is cheap. Seriously, a $50 ring would be perfect. I don't want something expensive because (A) it'll make me paranoid about losing/having it stolen, and (B) I'd rather use the money for something else, such as a house. However, my guy wants to spend about a grand on an engagement/wedding ring set. Given his income, this is far from an outrageous expense, but I'd still rather have my $50 cubic zirconia. I've talked with him about this, and we joke about how the stereotypical roles are reversed here, with me being the one who wants to go cheap and him wanting something more. But he's holding fast. Any ideas how I might be able to get my way and make him see that *he's* my prize, not the jewelry?

Not A Ring Girl

The difference between the engagement ring you'd prefer and the ring set your boyfriend wants to buy—$950—ain't nothin', but it's not enough to buy a fucking house. I could see digging in your heels if your fiancé wanted to spend 20 grand on a ring, as that kind of money would go a long way toward a down payment; I could see going to war if he were planning to go into debt to buy you a rock. But learning to pick your battles is the secret to a happy, successful marriage, and the difference between a $50 ring and a far-from-outrageous $1,000 ring set isn't worth fighting about. You want to make him see that he's your prize? Let him have his way on this.

My brother and his new wife had a three-way with a male hotel receptionist while on their honeymoon. I don't have a problem with three-ways in theory, but I think it's wrong to have one on your fucking honeymoon. I was their best man. What am I supposed to do now?

Disgusted Big Bro

You're supposed to shut the fuck up and mind your own business—now and always.

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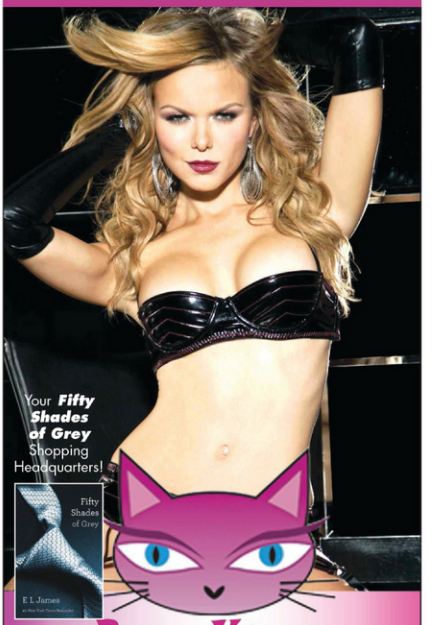

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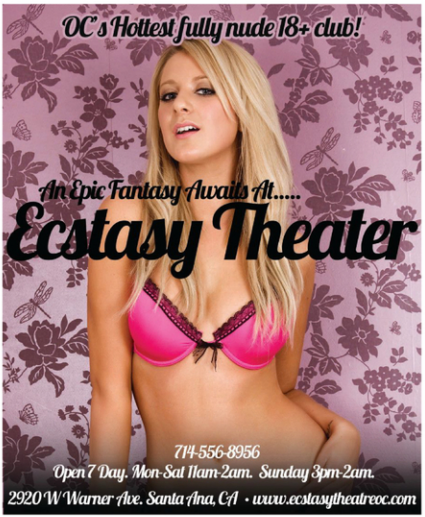
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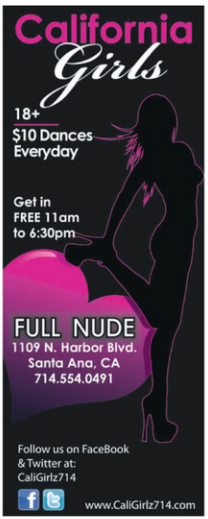
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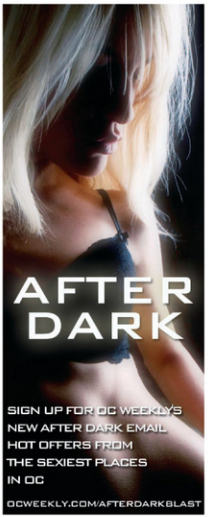
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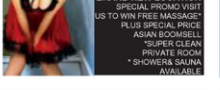

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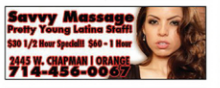

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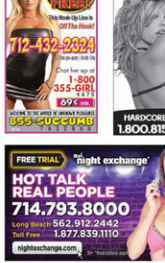

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Use FREE Code 5656. 18+

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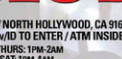
SPEARMINT RHINO GENTLEMEN'S CLUBS

15004 OXNARD ST. / VAN NUYS, CA 91411
818-994-6453 / 18+ w/ID TO ENTER / ATM INSIDE
MON-THURS: NOON-2AM FRI: NOON-4AM
SAT: 1PM-4AM SUN: 1PM-2AM
TEXT VNLA TO 76960 FOR FREE ADMISSION*

FREE ENTRY
THIS PASS IS GOOD FOR ONE FREE ENTRY INTO SR VAN NUYS* OR BLUE ZEBRA*.
*WITH 1 DRINK MIN. PURCHASE.
NOT VALID WITH ANY OTHER OFFER.
NOT VALID DURING SPECIAL ENGAGEMENTS.
LA WEEKLY *SPEARMINT RHINO VAN NUYS & BLUE ZEBRA NORTH HOLLYWOOD EXPIRES 07/01/13

6872 FARMDALE AVE. / NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CA 91606
818-765-7739 / 18+ w/ID TO ENTER / ATM INSIDE
SUN-THURS: 1PM-2AM
FRI-SAT: 1PM-4AM
TEXT BZLA TO 76960 FOR FREE ADMISSION*



SPEARMINT RHINO VAN NUYS

Weekly Events

START THE WEEK OFF RIGHT SUNDAYS!
$150 15 MIN. VIP ROOMS FROM 1PM-4PM & 7PM-10PM

CURE THE MONDAY BLUES
3 NUDE VIP DANCES FOR ONLY $90! FROM NOON-4PM & 7PM-10PM

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION TUESDAYS
$15 COVER CHARGE NOON-6:30PM
INCLUDES: 1 ENTRY, 1 DRINK & 1 TOPLESS DANCE
$25 COVER CHARGE 6:30PM-CLOSE
INCLUDES: 1 ENTRY, 1 DRINK & 1 TOPLESS DANCE

V.I.P. ROOM DEAL WEDNESDAYS
$150 15 MIN. VIP ROOMS FROM NOON-4PM & 7PM-10PM

3-DANCE THURSDAYS
$90 NUDE 3-DANCE VIP ROOMS FROM NOON-4PM & 7PM-10PM

KICKOFF THE WEEKEND FRIDAYS!
START THE WEEKEND OFF WITH THE HOTTEST LADIES IN THE VALLEY!

SATURDAY'S WEEKEND PARTY
DOZENS OF THE HOTTEST ENTERTAINERS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA!

BLUE ZEBRA NORTH HOLLYWOOD

$20 NUDES
7:30PM-11PM
$120 15 MIN. VIP
7:30PM-11PM
BEST DANCER DOMINATRIX GROUP DANCE SHOW CONTEST
BEST DANCER DOMINATRIX COSTUME CONTEST
MARCH 8TH
dominatrix
FRIDAY
JOIN US FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN
$1,000 ZEBRA CHIPS
IPAD MINI
DANCE VOUCHERS
SPORTS EVENT TICKETS
RAFFLE TICKET GIVEAWAY
STARTING FEB 22ND:
GET 1 TICKET WITH A DANCE SPECIAL PURCHASE
MARCH 8TH: (DAY OF EVENT)
GET 1 TICKET FOR EACH PAID ADMISSION
GET 2 TICKETS IF WEARING S&M ATTIRE w/PAID ADMISSION
GET 5 TICKETS FOR ANY RHINO LOGO ITEM PURCHASE

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ROUGE GENTLEMEN'S CLUB

14626 Raymer St • Van Nuys, CA 91405
818-786-1822

Mon-Wed: 1pm-2am / Thurs: 1pm-3am
Fri-Sat: 1pm-4am / Sun: 6:30pm-2am
Must be 18+ to enter / ATM Inside
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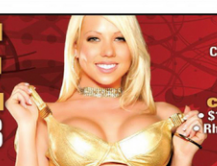
@rougevn
facebook.com/rougegentlemensclub



FREE ENTRY
This pass is good for one Free Admission.
1 drink minimum purchase required. Not good with any other offer.
LA Weekly • Rouge Gentlemen's Club • Expires 07/01/13

SUPER SUNDAYS
• $15 Cover Charge all day & night!!
Cover includes: 1 entry, 1 drink & 1 $10 dance voucher

2-4-1 MONDAYS
• 2-4-1 Lap Dances from 1pm-2am

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION TUESDAYS
• $10 Lap Dance Voucher with paid entry all day & night
• Rhino Chip surcharge waived on purchases $200 or more

VIP WENESDAYS
• $150 1/2hr. VIP Dance Special all day & night!

THURSDAY'S BATTLE OF THE BABES
• The Ladies of Rouge compete for Great Prizes at 7:30!
• 15min. Dances for only $100!

FRIDAY & SATURDAY WEEKEND KICK OFF!!
• Free Entry from 1pm-7:30pm with purchase of a drink
• 15min. Dances for only $120!

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810 Health

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Smoking@scuhs.edu
SCUHS.edu/stopsmoking

810 Health

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Call Today
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Have you been experiencing symptoms related to your schizophrenia such as loss of interest in daily activities, social withdrawal or loss of motivation? If so, please contact us to learn about a research study of an investigational medication for schizophrenia. To qualify you must be 18 to 60 years of age, have been taking an atypical schizophrenia medication for at least the last 2 months. Atypical medications for schizophrenia include: Abilify® Risperdal® Seroquel® Seroquel® Geodon® Symbyax® If you are taking other medications, please call to see if you may qualify. Qualified participants may receive study related medical exams and study medication at no cost. Compensation in relation to reimburses you for your time and travel.
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Fast Pro Tools stalls. Studio A has a Massive DAW Pro Tools HD4, one 80 vocal booth & Studio B Mix Room B has Pro Tools HD.
ALL GENRES - ALL STYLES
Vintage Keyboards
Calzone!!!
Location: Costa Mesa, CA
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17thStreetRecording.com

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EARN $500 A DAY
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SOUNDS BY: STRESS
Limelight glam KING FAM acropolis RECORDS clubdistrict.com

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Santa Ana
Tustin
Fountain Valley
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405
55

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LONG BEACH CONVENTION CENTER

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Exhibit Hall
Visit over **150 booths** to learn the latest natural health products.

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Includes speaker seminars, panels, movies and exhibit hall.

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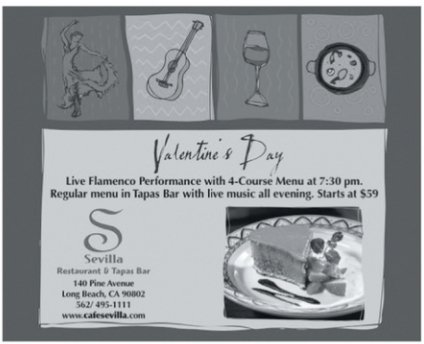
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Live Flamenco Performance with 4-Course Menu at 7:30 pm.
Regular menu in Tapas Bar with live music all evening. Starts at $59
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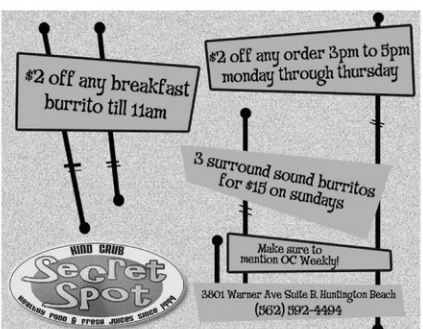
www.cafesevilla.com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TUESDAY
DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE IS THE WELL!
HAPPY HUMP DAY
$3 WELL WEDNESDAYS
SCHOONERS FOR THE PRICE OF PINTS
THURSDAY
$6.50 BUD LIGHT PITCHERS
FREE POOL
TGIF!!!
$3.75 WELL MARGARITA (ON ICE)
ESPOLON TEQUILA'S IN THE WELL!
E-X-T-E-N-D-E-D HAPPY HOUR 3-8PM
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MAR. 2- FIRESTONE PILS (PIVO HOPPY PILSNER)
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THE IMPROVISED SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

MAR 9, 8PM

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St. Patrick's Day Weekend Fun!

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MAR 16, 8PM

The three sons of 'The Godfather of Irish Music' Tommy Makem—Shane, Conor, and Rory Makem—combine forces with brothers Liam and Mickey Spain to deliver traditional folk songs, a mix of boisterous sing-alongs, and touching ballads.

Rennie HARRIS RHAW

MAR 30, 8PM

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SATURDAY/FEBRUARY 23

VAUD & THE VILLIANS
A 19 PIECE NEW ORLEANS ORCHESTRA AND CABARET SHOW

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 24
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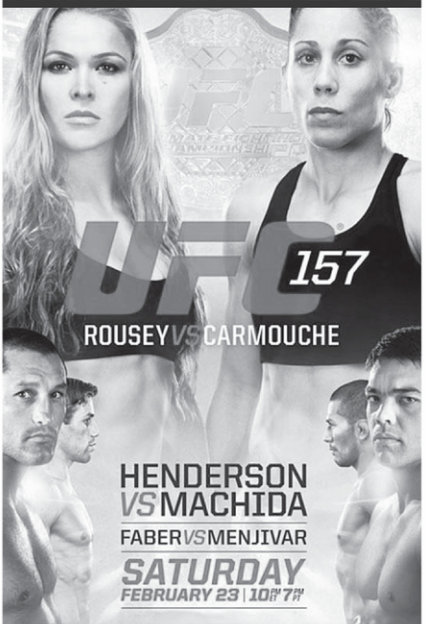

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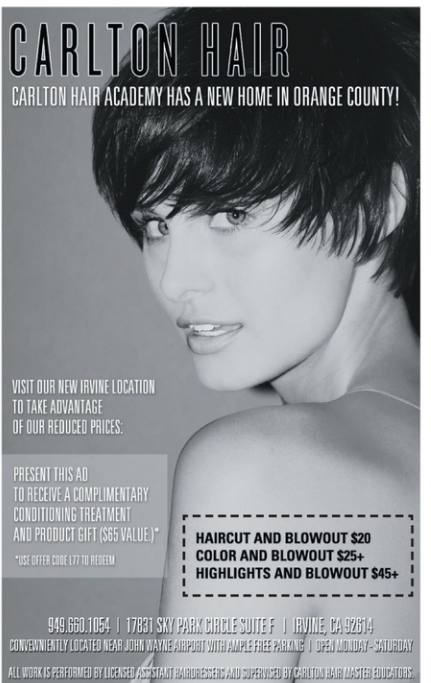
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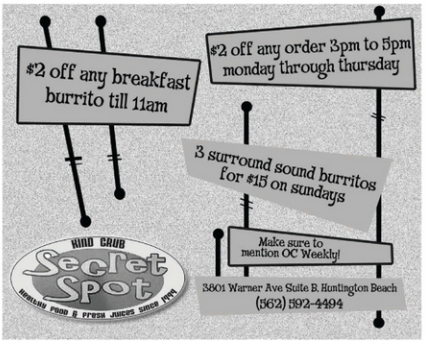
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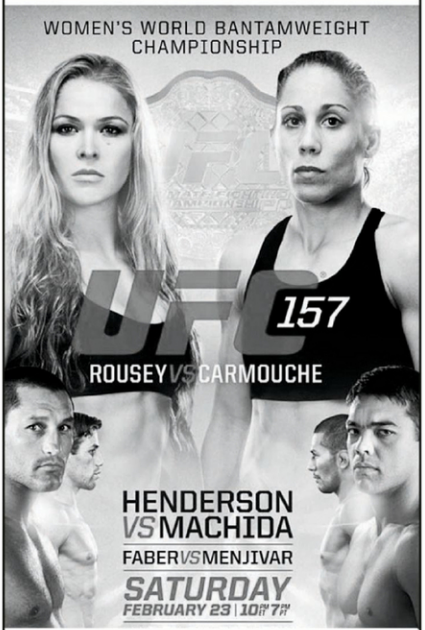

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Lake Forest
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Rancho Santa Margarita
Laguna Niguel
Laguna Beach
San Juan Capistrano
Dana Point
San Clemente
110
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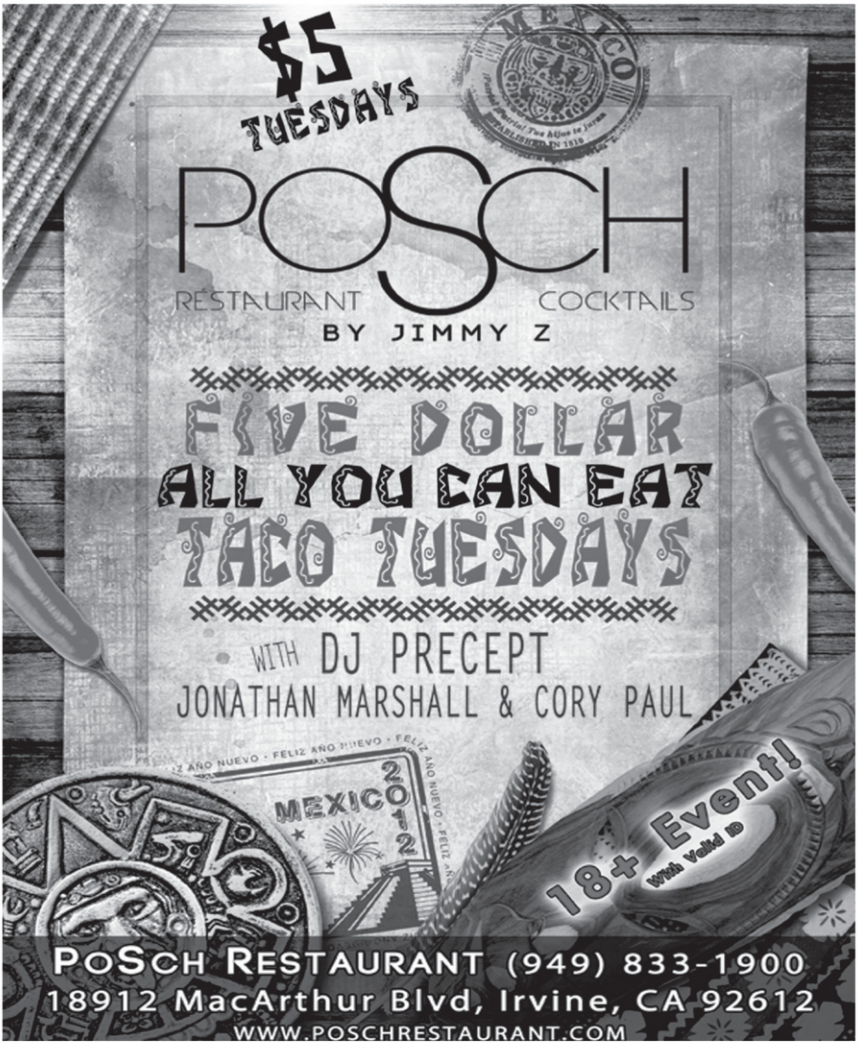
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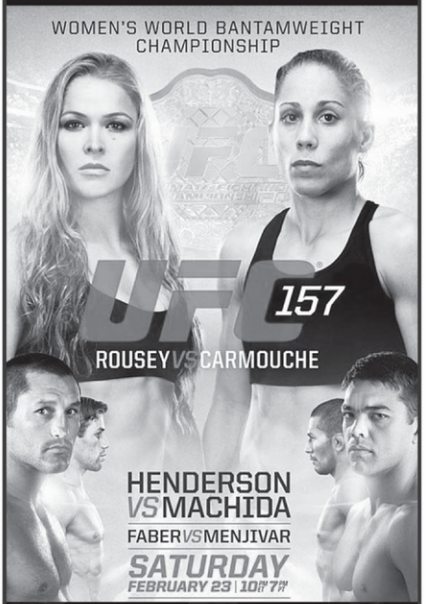

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